
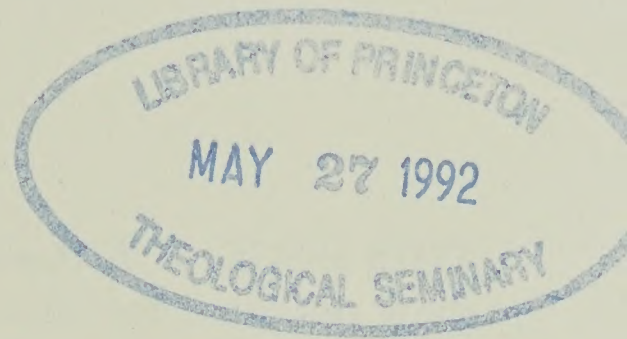


LS



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2020 with funding from
Princeton Theological Seminary Library



KOINONIA

Princeton Theological Seminary
Graduate Forum

Volume III.2

Fall 1991

THIS ISSUE of *Koinonia Journal* features articles especially rich in their potential for dialogue between theology and biblical studies. The first article, by Mark J. Larrimore, is a dialogue with Fergus O. P. Kerr's reading of Wittgenstein. Although Wittgenstein was not actually a theologian—he was a philosopher of religion, or more precisely, a philosopher of language—he was deeply concerned with theological questions. In treating Wittgenstein and Kerr, Larrimore leads us ably through the issues of language, meaning, and the possibility of transcendence which so occupied Wittgenstein.

The second article is a comparative analysis of the ethical reflections of H. Richard Niebuhr and James M. Gustafson, by D. Kevin McNeir. Here McNeir deals with two people for whom the meaning of life and of religion cannot be understood apart from a serious engagement with the ethical transformation of humanity. At the center of this discussion is the question of the distinctiveness of Christian ethics. McNeir concludes by relating the theories of Gustafson and Niebuhr to the praxis of Martin Luther King, Jr.

The two biblical studies articles which follow treat both testaments. In his analysis of Meir Sternberg's work on narrative poetics and biblical ideology, Douglas B. Miller examines the provocative issue of whether the poetics of the Bible are distinctive and in conformity with its ideology. Like Wittgenstein, Sternberg is interested in rules of discourse. But Miller questions Sternberg's thesis that the poetic strategy of the biblical narrative is as unique or as normative as its ideology.

Finally, David de Silva analyzes the vision of judgment in Matthew 25. He reopens the debate about whether the pericope primarily concerns the reception of itinerant missionaries or whether it is primarily ethical parenesis. De Silva concludes that this is ethical teaching designed to prepare the reader for the coming of the Day of the Lord. He challenges interpretations that would draw too hard a line between apocalyptic hope and ethical values.

Although quite different in content and approach, all four articles provide useful entrées to two difficult problems today: the problem of language and human discourse and the problem of the nature and structure of humanity's response to God. The *Koinonia Journal* editors hope this issue will serve a role in facilitating interdisciplinary discussion on these important matters.

—LOREN L. JOHNS

KOINONIA

VOLUME III.2 • FALL 1991

CONTENTS

	PAGE
ARTICLES	
Honest to God, the Real Wittgenstein: Fergus Kerr's <i>Theology after Wittgenstein</i> Mark Larrimore	103
Searching for the Transformed Nonconformist: A Comparative Analysis of the Ethical Reflections of H. Richard Niebuhr and James M. Gustafson D. Kevin McNeir	131
Meir Sternberg: Narrative Poetics and Biblical Ideology Douglas B. Miller	150
Renewing the Ethic of the Eschatological Community: The Vision of Judgment in Matthew 25 David A. de Silva	168

BOOK REVIEWS

<i>The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities</i> by Mark S. Smith Kathryn L. De Witt	195
<i>God in the White House: How Religion Has Changed the Modern Presidency</i> by Richard G. Hutcheson, Jr. Michael T. Girolimon	198
<i>Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology</i> by Daniel L. Migliore Cynthia L. Rigby	202
<i>The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions</i> by Jürgen Moltmann, trans. by Margaret Kohl Donald Schweitzer	205
<i>Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling</i> ed. by Rodney J. Hunter, H. Newton Malony, Liston O. Mills, and John Patton Wayne F. Albertson	208
<i>Iron John: A Book About Men</i> by Robert Bly William H. Jacobsen	212
<i>Fire in the Belly: On Being a Man</i> by Sam Keen William H. Jacobsen	215
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	219
INDEX 1991 (VOLUME III)	221

Honest to God, the Real Wittgenstein: Fergus Kerr's *Theology* *after Wittgenstein*

MARK LARRIMORE

Princeton University

'Wisdom is grey.' Life on the other hand and religion are full of color.
—*Culture and Value*

The signal difficulty in applying the therapeutic philosophy of the later Wittgenstein is that most students think they do not need it. Certainly, we *have* got the disease—where would we be if we hadn't?—but the assumption is that the only way to address it is to tempt it to develop philosophical complications. That is, switching metaphors, one must dilate the pupil before applying the medication: first infect, then cure. There *are* metaphysical assumptions about people and the world swimming around in our lives, but these don't in most cases express themselves as philosophical views of the sort Wittgenstein is commonly seen as attacking.

The danger is that the student will see Wittgenstein's therapy as relevant to the disease only when it exhibits such philosophical symptoms (i.e., the therapy is relevant only to the symptoms). But Wittgenstein is really concerned to expose the bad philosophy lurking in everyday idiom, not just in philosophical jargon. Philosophy comes in for scrutiny because Wittgenstein's patients (including, surely, himself) were afflicted with this particularly life-sapping form of the disease, *not*, I think, because the philosopher is the best or even representative example of the disease's suf-

ferers. Wittgenstein never encouraged his students to teach philosophy. He reproved himself for his engagement in the profession and reflected in 1947, "I am by no means sure that I should prefer a continuation of my work by others to a change in the way people live which would make all these questions superfluous" (Wittgenstein 1980a:61). Surely, then, infecting students with the philosophical form of the disease is not in keeping with the spirit of Wittgenstein—unless that were the only way to treat the disease.

Fergus Kerr's remarkable *Theology after Wittgenstein* proves decisively that this is not the only way. Kerr intended this book as an introduction to the thought of the later Wittgenstein for students of theology (the title is a trifle misleading). But it could also serve as an introduction for the rest of us—especially those of us who have learned Wittgenstein the pupil-dilating way described above. To the philosopher, theology may seem more exotic and less intellectually rigorous than many of the other disciplines to which Wittgenstein's name has recently been related (politics and ethics, anthropology and sociology, linguistic and literary theory, etc.).

What could one possibly learn about Wittgenstein from such an angle? A lot, for two important reasons. First, there are the concerns of theology—deep questions about the meaning of life, human nature and fulfillment and happiness, the place of the human being in the community and the cosmos, the significance of death, and God. These are almost certainly closer to the hearts of most people (including philosophers) than are the questions of analytical philosophy. One doesn't have to be a theist to recognize the depth and relevance of much theological speculation. One doesn't have to be open to theology's attempts at answers to benefit from seeing how it forms its questions. If the malady for which Wittgenstein sought a therapy goes to the core of our being in the world, then applying the therapy to these "theological" questions is a good idea.

The second reason why even the nontheologian who wishes to understand Wittgenstein stands to benefit from *Theology after Wittgenstein* is that Wittgenstein himself was profoundly concerned throughout his life with the questions Christian theology asks and

with the answers it attempts to give. Kerr approaches Wittgenstein's philosophical reflections as "readings between the lines of the story of the soul in the Western metaphysical tradition" (1986:166). He recommends Wittgenstein to his theological audience as "the last great philosopher . . . who cared passionately about the Christian religion" (1986:187). Whether he *was* the last may be open to debate, but there can be no question that religious questions mattered greatly to him. He is reported to have told his student M. O'C. Drury, "I am not a religious man, but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view" (Kerr 1986:33; Drury 1984:79).

A likely objection must be met at the outset. Does Wittgenstein's life-long concern with theological questions necessarily have anything to do with his philosophy? Is not his philosophical work a response to *philosophical* questions, which one may, and perhaps should, approach separately from those questions he approached when in more religious moods? Even some theologically inclined students of Wittgenstein, such as Drury, have taken this line. Reflecting on Wittgenstein's professed "religious point of view," Drury concludes that, for Wittgenstein, religion was actually an ethical imperative: "the simple demand that we should at all times and in all places say no more than we already know" (Kerr 1986:37; Drury 1984:79).

While philosophy should show "that what at first begins as the desire for a metaphysical theory is really something deeper, something which can only be satisfied by other than speculative constructions" (Kerr 1986:38; Drury 1984:84), matters of ultimate concern remained for Drury's Wittgenstein ineffable. Continuous with the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein's later philosophy "draws limits to the sphere of the ethical from the inside, as it were" (Drury quoting Wittgenstein's letter to Ficker).

If Drury is right, philosophy has its work cut out for it. What this would entail for the student of Wittgenstein's thought would be the almost *ethical* obligation to separate the philosophical (and edifying) from all other remarks in his *Nachlass*, with only the former meriting attention. If Wittgenstein himself saw his "philo-

sophical” speculations as qualitatively different from his speculations about music, culture, character and psychology, guilt, shame, redemption, and God, then the philosopher can leave these and the stories about war, school, Viennese mansions, Norwegian huts, detective magazines, and “flicks” to the curious. What Wittgenstein the man did may be interesting, she can say, but it can only distract the serious student. All that the study of his life can show is his profound ethical commitment to the integrity of philosophy (as he understood it).

Fergus Kerr argues that this tractarian ethical gloss of the “religious point of view” can’t explain the endless remarks on philosophical psychology even within the later “philosophical” work (1986:38). He says not just ethics, but the place of the soul in the body and society is in question here. Why does the *Philosophical Investigations* begin with a quotation from Augustine’s *Confessions*? (Presumably Locke would have served as well.) Kerr’s suggestion is that Wittgenstein chose Augustine because he is targeting not just modern philosophy, but perspectives on the human soul reaching deep into the theological tradition, of which Cartesian dualism, rationalism, empiricism, and Kantian autonomy are but recent expressions. Instead of seeing him as the avenging angel of modern philosophy, Kerr says one should approach Wittgenstein’s work as a dialogue with the *Fragestellung* of Christian theology. The proposal is a good one.

In *Theology after Wittgenstein*, Wittgenstein’s philosophical psychology provides a framework not only for relating Wittgenstein to the interests of students of theology and for developing a compelling story of his work, but also for discussing some major controversies in the philosophical study of Wittgenstein. The book is in three parts: an introduction to Wittgenstein’s later philosophy through a close study of the *Philosophical Investigations* (chapters 3 to 6), flanked by discussions of Wittgenstein’s understanding and account of religion (chapters 2 and 7), and the relevance and implications of his thought for theological concerns (chapters 1 and 8).

Kerr's exposition of Wittgenstein's ideas seems sound, coherent, and interesting.¹ But *Theology after Wittgenstein* is also a powerful new reading of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Being an introductory text, the book does not *argue* for this reading. In fact it does no more than hint at it in passing. But the impressive coherence Kerr achieves in laying out the main arguments of the later philosophy against this backdrop is argument enough. My purpose here is to articulate and to draw out some of the implications of this argument.

* * *

Theology after Wittgenstein is not ostensibly a new interpretation, but a correction of a misconstrual of Wittgenstein's work which has colored most theologians' appreciation of it. The primary use of Wittgenstein with which theologians are familiar is what Kai Nielsen has disparagingly called "Wittgensteinian fideism" (Nielsen 1967), the spinning out of some remarks of Norman Malcolm into a protective strategy² against reductionist explanations of religion. In his *Memoir*, Malcolm had written, "I believe that [Wittgenstein] looked on religion as a 'form of life' . . . in which he did not participate, but with which he was sympathetic." Later he said, "Religion is a form of life; it is language embedded in action—what Wittgenstein calls a 'language-game.' Science is another. Neither stands in need of justification, the one no more than the other" (Kerr 1986:31). Kerr argues that this claim is based on the mistaken notion "that any language-game functions in isolation from others," an idea which has "no basis in Wittgenstein's work" (1986:31).

¹ Of course, it is not, nor could it be, exhaustive. Some philosophers will probably complain that Kerr neglects Frege, mathematics, etc. Since Kerr makes sense of Wittgenstein without them, I find these omissions permissible for the reasons mentioned in the 'dilating the pupil' discussion above. However, one concept which is not discussed should have been: 'family resemblances.'

² See Wayne Proudfoot's discussion of protective strategies at work in the writings of the Wittgensteinian philosopher of religion, D. Z. Phillips (1985:200ff.).

Kerr provides in *Theology after Wittgenstein* a reading of Wittgenstein which starts with an understanding of the radical interdependence and interpenetration of language games and forms of life, an understanding which must change irrevocably our conceptions of the human being and her place in her community and the world. I will outline some of the important implications of Kerr's arguments: (i) the value of seeing Wittgenstein as continuous with German *Lebensphilosophie*; (ii) the dynamic character of language and culture in Wittgenstein's later thought; (iii) Wittgenstein's materialist understanding of language and culture and their roots in naturally expressive human action; and (iv) the possibility of transcendence.

LEBENSPHILOSOPHIE

Kerr's approach has no trouble making deep sense of the many directions Wittgenstein's work takes. His examination reveals the centrality, not of anything like an ego, but of *das Leben* (life) to Wittgenstein's mature thought. All inquiry leads ultimately to the given, *das Leben*. Kerr's exposition of the non-problem of solipsism concludes, "The 'foundations' upon which I exist as a self-conscious and autonomous being are the innumerable practices that collectively establish the tradition which is my native element. There is nothing deeper—there need be nothing deeper—than the unending 'game' which is 'the whole that consists of the language and the activities with which it is interwoven'" (Wittgenstein 1958b:7). *Das Leben* is "the human world" (Kerr 1986:147), and consists of everything we say, feel, think, or do. It is the "given" in the context of which we think, and "cannot be explored or explained any more deeply because it is the foundation of every kind of exploration and explanation" (Kerr 1986:69).

Thus Wittgenstein is in continuity with the tradition of *Lebensphilosophie* of "Nietzsche, Bergson, and others, from 1870 to 1920, who sought to undermine the metaphysical tradition" (Kerr 1986:136n) by asserting the primacy of *das Leben*. *Lebensphilosophie* rejects such metaphysical quandaries as realism-or-idealism,

because all of these alternatives wrongly suppose that *das Leben* can be transcended by our thoughts. Wittgenstein saw philosophy and life as of a piece. *Das Leben* is ineffably complex (Kerr 1986:65). It is the condition for all thought and cannot be viewed from outside, from Thomas Nagel's "nowhere."³

It is remarkable that those who ascribe reality only to things and not to our ideas move about so unquestioningly in the world as idea [*die Vorstellungswelt*] and never look outside it.

That is: how unquestioned the given still is. It would be the very devil if it were a tiny picture taken from an oblique distorting angle. The unquestioned—*life*—is supposed to be something accidental, marginal; while something over which I never normally puzzle at all is regarded as the real thing. (Wittgenstein 1975:V, 47)

Metaphysics is unwarranted because "there is nothing that contrasts with the form of our world" (Wittgenstein 1975:V, 47). We can't go beyond *das Leben*. "Words have meaning only in the stream of life" (Wittgenstein 1980c:II, 687). Wittgenstein asks himself, "Would it be correct to say that our concepts reflect our life?" He answers, "They stand in the middle of it [*Sie stehen mitten in ihm*]" (Wittgenstein 1975:III, 302). They are fully implicated in it (and it in them).

In his discussion of Wittgenstein's alleged idealism, Kerr draws out the parallel with Michael Dummett's arguments against realism. For instance, Dummett claims that where the realist assumes statements of a disputed class are either true or false—even if only God could ever know the difference—the "anti-realist takes more seriously the fact that we are immersed in time: being so immersed, we cannot frame any description of the world as it would appear to one who was not in time, but we can only describe it, i.e., as it is now" (Kerr 1986:128; cf. Dummett 1959:369). But

³Kerr singles out Thomas Nagel for praise, along with Bernard Williams, Charles Taylor, and Paul Feyerabend, as "post-Wittgensteinian" philosophers (1986:23–27).

Kerr argues also that Wittgenstein is no “nonrealist,” as Dummett also claimed (129f). For *Lebensphilosophie*, the questions of realism and idealism, notwithstanding their subaltern anti-’s and non-’s, cannot even be framed. “Do the systems [of colors and numbers] reside in *our* nature or in the nature of things?” (Wittgenstein 1967:357). The answer: “*Not* in the nature of colors or numbers.” As Kerr explains, the color system lies “in a certain collaboration between our nature and the nature of things” (Kerr 1986:102).

As Kant made clear, we cannot move beyond that collaboration to characterize it, let alone question its validity. One can make a similar argument for the concept of the self. In a bold move, Kerr suggests that the inseparability of a self from its context in experience is an emphasis common to Wittgenstein’s early and later philosophy. For the early Wittgenstein, Kerr argues, the self turns out to be the limit of (its) experience, so solipsism coincides with pure realism. “When I realize that there is no such object as I am strongly inclined to take myself to be, the world reappears as the place where I am at home. My consciousness . . . is my relation to my surroundings” (Kerr 1986:97). Yet, Kerr suggests, the same may be said for the later philosophy once the *I* dissolves into shared forms of interaction in the human world. The issue in neither case is the *I*. In both cases it is the quest to find a way for the self to feel “at home” in the world (1986:98). This quest is everything, but it is not a metaphysical one.

Das Leben also grounds all action. Wittgenstein asks, “How could one describe the human way of behaving?” (Wittgenstein 1967:567). He replies, “Surely only by sketching the actions of a variety of human beings as they interweave. What determines our judgement, our concepts and reactions, is not what *one* man is doing *now*, an individual action, but the whole hurly-burly [*das ganze Gewimmel*] of human actions, the background against which we see any action” (Kerr 1986:64–65). Just as we cannot peel concepts away from our experience in the human world, so too, we cannot separate actions and what they mean to us. This gives us a more adequate picture of the self than that of Cartesianism: “To under-

stand language as a form, or rather as a multiplicity of forms, of expressive activity . . . is to rehabilitate the self as a responsive agent in vital connection with others” and the world (Kerr 1986:134).

A DYNAMIC PICTURE

Kerr contrasts “life as a weave” with Wittgenstein’s early philosophy. “The prejudice in favour of a crystal-clear analysis of reality has given way to seeing life as an immensely intricate carpet, and, if that is still too static an image, as a teeming swarm” (1986:65). Too many philosophical accounts of Wittgenstein replace the metaphysical stasis of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* with a static picture of human life. They replace facts about the nature of reality with facts about our language games and forms of life; the assumption of the fixity of facts carries over. “Language” and “grammar” become reified. But games and forms *change* (e.g., see Wittgenstein 1969:256). Moreover, Wittgenstein wanted them to change. “The sickness of a time is cured by a change in people’s way of life,” he claims (Wittgenstein 1980b:II, 23), “and the sickness of philosophical problems could be cured only through a changed way of thinking and living” (Kerr 1986:169). Wittgenstein hoped that philosophy of the traditional sort would despair and die. He intended his work to have a *transformative* effect.

It may seem that the transformation Wittgenstein sought is just one of disenchantment, passing “from a piece of disguised nonsense to a piece of patent nonsense” (Wittgenstein 1958b:464). After all, Wittgenstein asserts that “philosophy . . . leaves everything as it is” (1958b:124). Lines such as these have led many interpreters of Wittgenstein to see him as concerned primarily with accommodation to the world, with trying to find a way to feel at home with the world as he found it by putting to rest grammatical illusions dressed up as metaphysical anxieties. But there is also the Wittgenstein of *On Certainty* (97): “Mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river bed of thoughts can shift.”

For the Wittgensteinian *Lebensphilosophie*, thoughts and actions

are intimately connected. A lot more than *philosophy's* dreams (and nightmares) hinge on grammatical illusions. Hence, the transformations sought after will not merely be in academicians' ways of thinking, but also in the forms of life in which all of us participate. So Fergus Kerr's way of making the point sounds liberating in the way in which Nietzsche can sound liberating. He says, "Much that we are 'naturally' inclined to think . . . turns out to be historically contingent and far from inevitable" (1986:51). Nothing is fixed, not even (or especially) our grammar.

Of course, Wittgenstein himself had little hope that forms of life could change in any positive way. "I have no sympathy for the current of European civilization and do not understand its goals, if it has any" (Wittgenstein 1980a:6). However, as Sabina Lovibond has shown, Wittgenstein's was not an inherently *anti*-progressive position (as has often been supposed). With a few added assumptions (more Hegelian in Lovibond's case than in Kerr's), a progressive politics *can* be spun out of Wittgenstein without distortion. Lovibond and Kerr show us that Wittgenstein's thought is compatible with historical consciousness. As Lovibond has put it,

Any person who succeeds in emancipating himself from the linguistic fetishism condemned by Wittgenstein thereby 'falls' in a somewhat theological sense, into the knowledge that 'words are also deeds' [Wittgenstein 1958b:546]. . . . He ceases to think of language primarily as a medium in which we *copy* reality, and comes to recognize the organic connection of each individual language with a specific *culture*—a complex of activities which, instead of being answerable (like a 'copy') to some norm or paradigm external to itself, may assume any (ecologically viable) form whatsoever. . . . Our recognition of this fact . . . confers upon our participation in the prevailing game a moral dimension that it did not previously possess. By acknowledging that we could do something other than what we actually do, we acknowledge the openness of our actual practice. (1983:117–118)

Both Kerr and Lovibond note the compatibility of Wittgenstein's thought with a Marxian understanding of human nature and society (if not destiny). Wittgenstein and Marx share a rigorously materialist account of the rise of human culture and thought. Both are engaged in what Wittgenstein calls the "natural history of human beings" (Wittgenstein 1958b:415). Kerr is careful to note that Wittgenstein was not a Marxist, but he can't help remarking that the return to forms of life "certainly works in favour of the Marxist thesis that it is from labour, and not from consciousness or even language, that structures of meaning arise" (Kerr 1986:68).

Wittgenstein is not known to have read Marxist texts, but Kerr admirably lays out the case for the likelihood of influence. Many of his friends—notably, Piero Sraffa—had Marxist leanings. A 1931 speech of Bukharin in London criticized the *Tractatus* for leaving out "the real subject, i.e., social and political man" in favor of a mere "stenographer" (Kerr 1986:67). In 1932 the long-awaited complete *German Ideology*,⁴ some of whose arguments about the importance of ordinary language and its groundedness in concrete patterns of interaction, was published. It shows striking affinities to Wittgenstein's later thought. For example, Marx and Engels write, "The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven [!] with the material activity and the material intercourse of men—the language of real life." "The philosophers have only to dissolve their language into the ordinary language, from which it is abstracted, in order to recognize it as the distorted language of the actual world, and to realize that neither thoughts nor language in themselves form a realm of their own, that they are only *manifestations* of actual life" (Kerr 1986:68; Marx and Engels 1976:V, 36).

Wittgenstein's was clearly a materialist understanding of culture. He says, "I want to regard man here as an animal; as a primitive being to which one grants instinct but not ratiocination. As a

⁴The English translation, edited by Wittgenstein's friend Roy Pascal, came out in 1938.

creature in a primitive state. Any logic good enough for a primitive means of communication needs no apology from us. Language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination" (Wittgenstein 1969:475). In response to Wittgenstein's suggestion that helping people in pain is a "primitive reaction," Kerr explains, "Human beings have primitive reactions, ways of behaving and relating to one another which give rise to various uses of signs and eventually, among much else, and quite rarely, to ratiocination, reflection and doubt" (Kerr 1986:115; cf. Wittgenstein 1967:540).

One of Wittgenstein's important contributions, Kerr reminds us, is the rehabilitation of "intrinsically expressive behavior" (46). Wittgenstein says, "'In my heart I have determined it.' And one is even inclined to point to one's breast as one says it. Psychologically, this way of speaking should be taken seriously. Why should it be taken less seriously than the assertion that belief is a state of mind?" (1958b:589). Kerr pairs this with the famous line, "The human body is the best picture of the human soul" (Wittgenstein 1958b:II, 178). Kerr explains that such gestures as clutching one's brow or pointing to one's heart "are no more 'adopted' simply to display one's meaning or feeling than the body is a puppet jerked by a little man inside. Such gestures *are* one's meaning or feeling this or that" (149).

This may sound behaviorist, but if it is, what would be the alternative? We don't, as a matter of fact, "accompany" every "meaningful" act with a thought or intention. People simply do not act that way. Kerr appeals to the *Philosophical Investigations*' shopkeeper who was asked for five red apples and turned it into a major enterprise of reconnaissance. "The opening story, one comes to suspect, is a joke at the expense of the self-conscious individual" (115; cf. Wittgenstein 1958b:1).

That human acts may be seen as rational choices is no more important for what it is to be human than the fact that many perfectly meaningful acts are carried out without that kind of self-consciousness. "There is a primitive expressiveness about the human body" which requires no "mental or spiritual injection" to have meaning. "Our reactions, in many situations, are already as

significant as they could be.” In fact, “the gestures of commitment, regret, delight, compassion, and so on, are as likely to be at the origin of the inner mental states (if any) as they are to be the effect. Indeed, but for the natural expressiveness of certain primitive reactions we should not have any interesting mental or emotional states in the first place” (Kerr 1986:150). This connects with the argument against the possibility of a private language. As Kerr points out, no wedge can be driven between pain and its expression. Naming one’s sensations presupposes a language. The very concept of emotion involves its *visibility* (85–89).

Here again the specter of behaviorism rears its head. Kerr reminds us that Wittgenstein anticipates (or rather, has himself gone through) this. “‘Are you not really a behaviourist in disguise? Aren’t you at bottom really saying that everything except human behavior is a fiction?’” he asks himself. He gets the answer: “If I do speak of a fiction, then it is of a *grammatical* fiction” (Wittgenstein 1958b:307). It is the way we talk that is wrong. We are misled by grammar to suppose that our thoughts and sensations and meanings are “describable objects” (Kerr 1986:91) which exist independently of the human language we might (but need not, the grammar implies) use in describing or expressing them.

However, there can be “no ‘inner experience’ which does not have conceptual links with other people’s experience” (Kerr 1986:75). Here again the point is that *das Leben* cannot be transcended. Such transcendence is another grammatical illusion. The conclusion is not that we *are* our behavior, as distinct from putative purely inner states. It is rather that the question is badly formed. Our behavior and “inner states” are, in a quite literal sense, *inextricably* connected with each other and with the *Leben* of the community of language users to which we belong.

Kerr usefully contrasts Davidson’s and Wittgenstein’s dissolutions of the “conceptual relativism” problem. “For Davidson, to think of a conceptual framework is to think of a *language*; but for Wittgenstein, to think of a language is to think of an *activity*” (Kerr 1986:108). It is, Kerr claims, unthinkable that there should be

humans whose activities are radically unintelligible to us. "It is our bodiliness that founds our being able, in principle, to learn any natural language on earth" (109). This may seem a trifle naïve, but it seems a fair exposition of Wittgenstein's position. In *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough* and elsewhere Wittgenstein is not concerned with the radical unintelligibility this question worries about. Further, if Wittgenstein's materialist understanding of the development of the human world is right, then "the natural language of all people" (Augustine in Wittgenstein 1958b:1) must be the basis of all human language, for every language develops out of "primitive reactions."

NATURAL TRANSCENDENCE

The materialism (a better word may be naturalism) of Kerr's Wittgenstein differs from Marx (and Lovibond) in another important respect than just Hegelianism. Out of the natural human reactions to each other and the world to which Wittgenstein directs our attention come not only language and thought, but language and thought *about God*. Wittgenstein declares,

Life can educate one to a belief in God. And *experiences* [*Erfahrungen*] too are what bring this about; but I don't mean visions and other forms of sense experience which show us the 'existence of this being,' but, e.g., sufferings of various sorts. These neither show us God in the way a sense impression shows an object, nor do they give rise to *conjectures* about him. Experiences, thoughts—life can force this concept on us. (Wittgenstein 1980a:86)

Kerr explores the potential of this through a consideration of Wittgenstein's fascination with and response to two classics of religious studies: William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* and Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. The former greatly impressed Wittgenstein with its insistence on the primacy of feeling and instinct in the founding of religious beliefs. The latter discussed the varieties, one might say, of religious cultus, concentrating on rites which

involved or seemed to refer to human sacrifice. Kerr suggests that Wittgenstein tempered James' individualistic conception of self with Frazer's emphasis on the centrality of public ritual. But he says Wittgenstein rejected Frazer's idea that primitive rites are misguided attempts at science. Wittgenstein had a Jamesian appreciation that religion is not developed out of beliefs, that it is not at heart about explanation (Kerr 1986:157f). Wittgenstein insists that the meaning of religious practice inheres in its surface expressions, that rituals are natural human reactions to the mysteries of the natural world—to death, sexual life, etc. (1979:7). "We could almost say man is a ceremonious animal," he concludes.

Wittgenstein finds something "deep and sinister" about the rites Frazer describes. These rites are not simply our reaction to primitive technology. It only seems this way to us because "we find [the principle linking these practices] in our soul" (Wittgenstein 1979:5). Kerr drives this home. Not to see that we too have needs which might express themselves in human sacrifice is to "evade the truth about ourselves" (Kerr 1986:161).

In the concluding chapter of *Theology after Wittgenstein*, Kerr returns to these reflections and endorses René Girard's anthropological theory of the importance of "scapegoating" for the stability of communities. He praises the christology and theology of atonement Raymund Schwager bases on this. Once "the scapegoating mechanism is *revealed*, the possibility arises of a way of life *without* victimizations. Jesus was scapegoated, willingly, to preserve the community, but in the aftermath of his execution, the cycle was apparently broken" (Kerr 1986:182). However, this cycle is broken only if we realize our capacity for scapegoating. "If we go on saying 'We have no sin,' Girard says, we shall be resisting the terrible truth about ourselves that we need scapegoats to keep ourselves at peace" (Kerr 1986:182).

Kerr has thus given the development of human history and culture a Wittgensteinian-materialist reading. But this is a materialism of which a theist need not be afraid. Marx was sure that he could—in principle, if not in practice—prove that every human idea was the product of the interaction of observable natural and

historical forces. Wittgenstein's awareness of the "ineffable" complexity of *das Leben*, of the way it teems with words and gestures and practices and meanings, precludes the taking of such a position. Its boundaries, being unfathomable, are best thought of as porous (i.e., as not being sharp boundaries at all).⁵ Unlike the Marxist, the Wittgensteinian is not involved in positivistic science. This makes it impossible to insist on a naturalism which would categorically *exclude* the divine. (Whether the existence of the divine can be categorically affirmed is another matter.)

This question is to some extent sidestepped by Kerr. For Wittgenstein, religion is not about belief alone, as shown by an important passage from *Remarks on Colour* (Wittgenstein 1975:III, 317):

When someone who believes in God looks around him and asks, 'Where did everything that I see come from?' . . . he is *not* asking for a (causal) explanation; and the point [Witz] of his question is that it is the expression of such a request. Thus, he is expressing an attitude towards all explanations. But how is this shown in his life? It is the attitude that takes a particular matter seriously, but then at a particular point doesn't take it seriously after all, and declares that something else is even more serious. Someone may for instance say it's a very grave matter that such and such a person should have died before he could complete a certain piece of work; and yet, in another sense, this is not what matters. At this point one uses the words 'in a deeper sense.' Actually I should like to say that in this case too the *words* you utter or what you think as you utter them are not what matters, so much as the difference they make at various points in your life. (151-152)

⁵ "What makes a limit a limit . . . always includes knowledge of what is on both sides of it. It is the dialectic of the limit to exist only by being removed" (Gadamer 1975:307). Where Gilbert Ryle would have found a *reductio ad absurdum*, Karl Rahner spins out transcendence: "A subject which knows itself to be finite, and in its knowledge is not just unknowing with regard to the limited nature of the possibility of its objects, has already transcended its finiteness. It has differentiated itself as finite from a subjectively and unthematically given horizon of possible objects that is of infinite breadth" (1978:20).

What we mean when we say, “I believe in God,” Kerr explains, “will come out at various places in our lives: our practices, aspirations, hopes, virtues, and so on.” The correlation we make “between our words and some item of metaphysical reality” is of lesser importance (Kerr 1986:153).

Wittgenstein found the Catholic quest to prove the existence of God misguided. “God’s essence is supposed to guarantee his existence,” he says.

What this really means is that what is here at issue is not the existence of something. Couldn’t one say equally well that the essence of colour guarantees its existence? As opposed, say, to white elephants. Because all that really means is: I cannot explain what ‘colour’ is, what the word ‘colour’ means, except with the help of a colour sample. So in this case there is no such thing as explaining ‘what it *would* be like if colours *were* to exist. (Wittgenstein 1980a:82)

This is because there is no position, as it were, outside the color system from which its existence might be a discussable hypothesis. “And now we might say: There can be a description of what it would be if there were gods on Olympus—but not: ‘what would it be like if there were such a thing as God?’” (Wittgenstein 1980a:154–155). This may sound like the ontological argument, but it is still just a grammatical one about how the word *God* is used.

The only reference to theology in *Philosophical Investigations* is at Wittgenstein 1958b:373. “Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar.)” The reference is to Luther’s comment that theology is the grammar of the word *God*, and this seems “absolutely right” to Kerr. “Theology, in practice, has always included a great deal of critical reflection on what people are inclined to say about the divine” (Kerr 1986:146). The appeal to grammar has misled too many into supposing that although God is an object independent of all our other experiences (and language), God is immediately accessible to us and that it is our

task to describe God. (“A substantive makes us look for a thing that corresponds to it,” as Wittgenstein says [1958a:1].) But nothing can be described or experienced in a manner unmediated by the *Lebensformen* in which we live. “God” is no exception. Yet this is no reproach to our powers. “It is an illusion to think that we either could or could not get a picture of the object [God]: there is no such object” (147).

This suggests that “theology as grammar” should look to the *use* of religious language. For Kerr, this is a matter of religious practice; in fact, religious practice is primary. Kerr concludes his discussion of Wittgenstein’s *Remarks on Frazer’s Golden Bough* with the claim that “religions are an expression of human nature long before they give rise to reflections about the divine” (Kerr 1986:162). A post-Wittgensteinian theology will be “a theology that starts where we are; a theology for ceremonious animals, so to speak, rather than for cerebrating solipsists; . . . theology *naturalized*” (Kerr 1986:163).

Recognizing our finitude (for this is what it is) need not, on a *Lebensphilosophie* view, mean that there can be no transcendence, no revelation, and no experience beyond that which is describable in language. Describability is no more the decisive point here than description is the decisive point of language. Wittgenstein remarks that although we cannot describe the aroma of coffee, we are not bothered by this inability.

I should like to say, ‘These [musical] notes say something glorious, but I do not know what.’ These notes are a powerful gesture, but I cannot put anything side by side with it that will serve as an explanation. A grave nod. James: ‘Our vocabulary is inadequate.’ Then why don’t we introduce one? What would have to be the case for us to be able to? (Wittgenstein 1958b:610)

The problem is not the lack of descriptive capacity, but the “strange illusion” (Wittgenstein 1958a:166) that we should be able to describe everything. Kerr concludes, “Our language is not just a tolerable *façon de parler*, as if *faute de mieux*. It is not a failure on

our part that we cannot say what the music expresses. We do better to awaken to the possibility that our way of life is the incomparable thing it is, without compulsively contrasting it all the time with alien alternatives” (166).

This means we must realize that we can have no experiences that are not in principle “conceptually related” to the (expressed) experiences of others. Nor can we ever express the “limits of our language.” *Das Leben* is shared and earthy, but its boundaries are porous. In an article arguing the inviability of Karl Rahner’s notion that we are the product of “transcendence towards the holy mystery,” Kerr endorses a Heideggerian line similar to the conclusion of his Wittgensteinian theory of religion. “Man becomes human only as he learns to live within the confines of the world—and then, by surplus or a kind of grace, God’s presence might be granted” (1981:377).⁶

* * *

Fergus Kerr has done a commendable job of explaining the coherence of Wittgenstein’s concerns. He has proved conclusively that—whatever Wittgenstein himself may have thought on these subjects—Wittgenstein’s philosophy is compatible with both social progressivism and theism. Yet what does compatibility show? I have tried to suggest that we must not take at face value the claim that Wittgenstein’s philosophy “leaves everything as it is” (Wittgenstein 1958b:124). Rather, it has a transformative purpose, and this transformative purpose has a direction. This direction might be established by showing the *incompatibility* of Wittgenstein’s philosophy with alternatives to social progressivism and theism. Can this be done?

Sabina Lovibond has shown that a vulgar conservative understanding of cultures is not compatible with Wittgenstein’s views.

⁶In a footnote, Kerr quotes a footnote from Heidegger’s *Vom Wesen des Grundes* (1929): “The ontological interpretation of being human as being-in-the-world tells neither for or against the possible existence of God. One must first gain an *adequate concept* of being human by illuminating transcendence. Then, by considering being human, one can *ask* how the relationship of being human to God is ontologically constituted.”

The Winchian view to which she responds claimed, at root, that forms of life support only such language games as support those forms of life (it is as viciously circular as this). But this argument is simply wrong as a general point about culture. Recognizing the historical contingency of our forms of life and experiencing our capacity to support or not support various language games by our words and deeds makes us aware of the “openness of our actual practice to . . . critical scrutiny” (1983:118).

The vulgar Wittgensteinian conservative view fails because it does not appreciate the existence both of what Hegel called *Sittlichkeit*—uncritical, un-self-conscious participation in a form of life, and of *Moralität*—“the requirement to bring about what *ought* to be but *is not* (yet)” (Lovibond 1983:64). The existence of these two is all but inevitable, for any

imperfectly coherent form of life necessarily encompasses the values which govern the thought of dissenters as well as those which govern the thought of the orthodox: it encompasses institutions which are dedicated to incompatible (or dubiously compatible) ends, and that is why there can arise within it competing habits of judgement and reasoning . . . The dissenting values, too, are grounded in the form of life. (1983:122)

Wittgenstein is ever reminding us of the historical contingency of our forms of life. As long as we realize this, we “can never again participate otherwise than reflectively in any language game” (1983:122). Wittgenstein’s compatibility with social progressivism (of a communitarian sort) means more, now that a static conservatism has been shown to be incompatible with it.

What about the compatibility with theism? It would be no small feat if Wittgenstein’s philosophy could be proved to be both irrefutable and incompatible with atheism! The case does not seem to be as clear here as it was above. Since Kerr is writing for theologians, he does not bother to draw out the compatibility of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy (understood as continuous with *Lebensphilosophie*) with atheism. It may be instructive for us to do so.

The atheist, it seems, can accept *everything* I have represented as being Wittgenstein's view (as interpreted by Kerr). Yes, she might say, *das Leben* cannot be transcended; its boundaries are, as we have said, porous. Yes, our language games and forms of life are historically contingent and subject to (perhaps consciously directed) change. And yes, we are better off without metaphysical-grammatical illusions about solipsistic egos, radically private experience, the soulless and timeless character of signs, denigration of the body and its natural expressiveness, society and history, and all the rest.

"However," the nontheist might argue, "On what grounds does Kerr imply that language of God is not a metaphysical-grammatical illusion like the others? Isn't there a gap in rigor here?" (The gap, if it is a gap, is in Wittgenstein, too, but that only increases the interest of the question.) Saying that the boundaries of *das Leben* are porous allows for the experience of the divine only if there were such a thing as the divine. As a matter of fact, God is dead. As Nietzsche realized, metaphysics and God must stand or fall together. One is as illegitimate as the other. It is not enough to say that human beings can't help engaging in ceremonious activity or that they are naturally compelled to conceive of a God, so to speak. If we proved incapable of regarding the heavens at night without seeing shapes in the stars, would that prove that there really was an astral bear named Ursa Major, a dysfunctionally big dipper, or even both?

There is an unargued assumption here—namely, that God exists—which cannot in fact be accounted for on the Wittgensteinian account we have been giving. Kerr rightly notes that "the 'raw material' for 'philosophical treatment' being 'what we are tempted to say' [Wittgenstein 1958b:254], it is vital to bring the temptation out into the open. The intuitive appeal of the temptation has first to be exposed, often against a strong desire to trivialize or deny it" (48–49). Therapy *begins* here. It consists in overcoming the temptation to the degree possible. In some cases, no doubt, the temptation will prove irremovable. But surely this means only that we must deal with that recalcitrance, not that this recalcitrance is divinely ordained!

The question of recalcitrances, of natural dispositions, comes down to one's conception of human nature. All accept that human beings are irreducibly social beings. But can we say more than this? Is *everything* contingent? Are we condemned at every moment to reinvent humanity?

Kerr has (somewhat naïvely, but this again is true to Wittgenstein) suggested that the “natural language of all peoples” is itself a given. He concludes his discussion of conceptual schemes with the insistence that it is unthinkable that there should be humans whose activities are radically unintelligible to us.

We should be well along the way to understanding an alien people when we saw pain, fear, joy, etc., in their faces and actions. . . . Mutual understanding would often be difficult, and on particular issues quite unattainable. But there would always be an immense range of activities, such as slaking thirst, erecting shelters, helping the sick, and so on, where we collaborated, understanding one another's reactions immediately. In the process we should no doubt weep and joke with one another, and so ‘find our feet’ with one another. (Kerr 1986:108)

Wittgenstein says as much: “The common human way of acting [*die gemeinsame menschliche Handlungsweise*] is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language” (1958b:206). There *are* strong hints here of an immutable human nature, whose “primitive reactions” are never far below the surface of *das Leben*. It is as though Wittgenstein has boiled human interactions down to a core set of language games, which have become the building blocks of everything else. Consider the following list of language-games (from Wittgenstein 1958b:23):

Giving orders, and obeying them—
Describing the appearance of an object or giving its
measurements—
Constructing an object from a description
(a drawing)—

Reporting an event—
 Speculating about an event—
 Forming and testing a hypothesis—
 Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and
 diagrams—
 Making up a story; and reading it—
 Play-acting—
 Singing catches—
 Guessing riddles—
 Making a joke; telling it—
 Solving a problem in practical arithmetic—
 Translating from one language to another—
 Asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying.

Many of these are clearly specific to our culture and even our century. But some others are fundamental in the sense that we cannot imagine a human society existing without them. Could we imagine a society with no language-game of asking? of thanking? of cursing? of greeting? of praying? At some point⁷ we would say: “‘These men . . . have nothing human about them.’ Why? We could not possibly make ourselves understood to them. Not even as we can to a dog” (Wittgenstein 1967:390). The question is whether this rich but minimalist understanding of human nature reveals certain basic language-games which could serve as evidence of a place for the human in a divine plan. Kerr suggests that the theist learns the uses of the word *God* through such fundamentally human activities as “blessing and cursing, celebrating and lamenting, repenting and forgiving” (Kerr 1986:155). That these may not all be found in every culture is not the issue here, so much as the implication that they *point* to a divine reality.

“That we are fragile and contingent beings is a common enough reflection,” Kerr notes in the Rahner article. “But the main question . . . is precisely what one may legitimately make of the thought” (1981:372). To a dogmatic materialist, behavior

⁷ It would be inappropriate to sound essentialist here. We recognize that some critical mass of language games is needed, but we can’t specify what these are, and had better assume that there is not an unchanging core. See Wittgenstein’s discussion of “family resemblances” in 1958b:67.

which “points” to some beyond must be understood as a projection of human meaning onto an inert and neutral field of experience. Indeed, to speak of transcendence *as* transcendence, one must leave behind the assumptions of such a materialistic frame of reference. The materialist would add that some other assumptions must take their place—perhaps William James’ “religious hypothesis” (1967:731f).

On the other hand, our discussion of religious experience in the light of *Lebensphilosophie* suggests that a religious attitude might not rest on any particular *assumption* about the nature of reality, let alone an assumption which would make religious experience transcendent.⁸ *All* of a religious person’s experience of “this world” might seem to point to something transcendent. Perhaps, as Rainer Maria Rilke beautifully puts it, not just some but *all* human practices bespeak transcendence.

Es gibt im Grunde nur Gebete,
so sind die Hände uns geweiht,
daß sie nichts schufen was nicht flehte;
ob einer malte oder mähte,
schon aus dem Klingen der Geräte
entfaltete sich Frömmigkeit. (1972:35)

[Fundamentally there are but prayers,
for that were our hands consecrated,
so nothing they make doesn’t plead;
whether a person paints or reaps,
already from the ringing of the tools
piety unfolds.]

This issue cannot be resolved, because the various accounts one might give of apparently transcendent *Lebensformen* are incommensurate. Even if one agrees that language about “God” (or “ultimate truth” or whatever) naturally arises in human inter-

⁸In his attack on “religious experience” in his book by that name, Wayne Proudfoot argues that every putatively religious experience implicitly rests on assumptions of this sort.

course with the world, one might argue that: (a) this is a perversity of nature which must be overcome or made the center of our existence; (b) since the world is the work of God, human beings are so outfitted as naturally (or eventually or occasionally) to sense this; (c) revelation or grace lifts the scales from (some) people's eyes and makes it possible for them to understand their "signals of transcendence" as homing in on true divinity just as flowers follow the sun. Nobody could arbitrate between these views, not even Wittgenstein. Each already has dealt with the others. From the first point of view, (b) and (c) are immature or backward or wishful thinking. For (b), (a) is blind, although whose fault it is varies from case to case. And (c) sees too large a gulf between the creator and the creation. For (c), (a) is benighted and (b) is presumptuous.

The point is that there can be no discussion here, for at a deep level, (a), (b), and (c) approach their experience against radically different backdrops of metaphysical assumptions. Kerr (again not unfaithfully to Wittgenstein) has neglected the importance of such metaphysical outlooks for the way people deal with each other, the way they explain why anything exists, and how they find a way to be at home in the world. In particular, he has neglected their relevance for why today these outlooks involve fairly explicit rejections of the others (as I have sketched out above). Certainly religion is not just about these kinds of beliefs about the world. Religious practices underlie them—historically, socially, and psychologically. But Kerr's Wittgenstein almost gives the impression that religious beliefs are epiphenomenal to religious practice. "God" ends up being no more than a tag for whatever is of prime concern to a person or community as revealed in her acts and words. I suspect he would have a difficult time accounting for the very real felt difference between a Christian and a "post-Christian" engaged in the same kinds of family and social situations.

Why is this? Wittgenstein was operating in a metaphysical scheme more like Kerr's than that of most contemporary philosophers of religion. Wittgenstein's "spiritual exercises," as Kerr at

one point calls them (Kerr 1986:47f), are internal to a single, basically unchallenged, scheme: the scheme of Christianity. His questions are *Christian* questions, even if his answers don't quite add up. One might characterize them as, "What do we make of God?" Contemporary philosophy of religion, however, is concerned with the question, "Is there, and need there be, anything like a God?"

On these questions, as Kerr's book shows, Wittgenstein is of no help. He leaves the thoughtful person more or less where she started (though she'll probably be more aware of standing with both feet on the ground). G. E. M. Anscombe has reported that Wittgenstein once said of his later work, "Its advantage is that if you believe, say, Spinoza or Kant, this interferes with what you believe in religion; but if you believe me, nothing of the sort" (Kerr 1986:32). If for *Lebensphilosophie* there can be no *religious* experience understood as experience of some religious reality distinct from the rest of our experience, experience is of the real, or rather, we define the real by what we experience. (This is true even if we construct it and validate it by the language of the communities to which we belong.) Of what else should religious experience be but the real?

Wittgenstein's own position is that of one who couldn't make up his mind on the very problems I have here laid out. On the one hand, Wittgenstein seems to have known what many theologians speak of when they describe the human being as being naturally oriented to transcendence. But on the other, Wittgenstein deeply understood that there is never quite enough evidence, never quite enough to know what the human should make of the divine, never quite the guarantee that humans themselves cannot meet all their own needs. To what do religious language games point? What makes them "point" at all? Wittgenstein's paradoxical answer might be, "What makes *anything* point?"

How does it come about that this arrow → *points*?
Doesn't it seem to carry in it something besides itself?
'No, not the dead line on paper; only the psychical
thing, the meaning can do that.' That is both true and

false. The arrow points only in application that a living being makes of it.

This pointing is *not* a hocus-pocus which can be performed only by a soul. (Wittgenstein 1958b:454)

REFERENCES

- Drury, M. O'C.
1984 "Some Notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein."
In *Recollections of Wittgenstein*. Ed. Rush Rhees.
Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dummett, Michael
1959 "The Basis of Realism." In *Truth and other Enigmas*.
London: Duckworth, 1978.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg
1975 *Truth and Method*. New York: Crossroad.
- James, William
1967 "The Will to Believe." In *The Writings of William James*. Ed. John J. McDermott. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pp. 717–734.
- Kerr, Fergus O. P.
1981 "Rahner Retrospective III: Transcendence or Finitude." *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 62, No. 735.
1986 *Theology after Wittgenstein*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Lovibond, Sabina
1983 *Realism and Imagination in Ethics*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels
1976 *Collected Works*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

- Nielsen, Kai
 1967 "Wittgensteinian Fideism." *Philosophy*, Vol. XLII No. 161
- Proudfoot, Wayne
 1985 *Religious Experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Rahner, Karl
 1978 *Foundations of Christian Faith*. Trans. William V. Dych. New York: Crossroad.
- Rilke, Rainer Maria
 1972 *Das Stunden Buch*. Frankfurt am Main: Insel.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig
 1958a *The Blue and Brown Books*. Oxford: Blackwell.
 1958b *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
 1967 *Zettel*. Ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Berkeley: University of California Press.
 1969 *On Certainty*. Ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright. Trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe. New York: Harper.
 1975 *Philosophical Remarks*. Ed. Rush Rhees. Trans. R. Hargreaves and R. White. Oxford: Blackwell.
 1977 *Remarks on Colour*. Ed. G. E. M. Anscombe. Trans. L. L. McAlister and M. Schättle. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
 1979 *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*. Ed. Rush Rhees. Trans. A. Miles and Rush Rhees. Retford: Brynmill.
 1980a *Culture and Value*. Ed. G. H. von Wright in collaboration with Heikki Nyman. Trans. Peter Winch. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
 1980b *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*. Ed. G. H. von Wright, Rush Rhees, and G. E. M. Anscombe. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell.
 1980c *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Vol. II. Ed. G. H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman. Trans. C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue. Oxford: Blackwell.

Searching for the Transformed Nonconformist

A Comparative Analysis of the Ethical Reflections of
H. Richard Niebuhr and James M. Gustafson

D. KEVIN MC NEIR

Princeton Theological Seminary

Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom 12:2)

This hour in history needs a dedicated circle of transformed nonconformists. Our planet teeters on the brink of atomic annihilation; dangerous passions of pride, hatred, and selfishness are enthroned in our lives; truth lies prostrate on the rugged hills of nameless calvaries; and men do reverence before false gods of nationalism and materialism. The saving of our world from pending doom will come, not through the complacent adjustment of the conforming majority, but through the creative maladjustment of a nonconforming minority. (King 1963:23f)

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history humanity has struggled in its search for the “right way” to live. As humankind has progressed from cave to hut, from rural farm to urban metropolis, it has been essential that

we learn how to live together. As more and more people seek to occupy fewer square feet of land, it has become evident that our options are few: live together in peace or die in confrontation. This time in history is in need of transformation.

When Christian ethics is viewed only as a theoretical exercise it loses both its meaning and purpose. The following article argues that what H. Richard Niebuhr called “conversionist” theory is the most appropriate model for the Christian ethicist. I will use it as my guide throughout this article. While for the most part the discussion is based on reflection about the work of James Gustafson and H. Richard Niebuhr, the title of this article—“Transformed Nonconformist”—and the two excerpts at the beginning point to another author: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Many of my conclusions come from an attempt to connect the theories of James M. Gustafson and H. Richard Niebuhr with the praxis of Martin Luther King, Jr.

The second excerpt is from a sermon which follows the challenge of the apostle Paul (as quoted in the first excerpt) that humanity be transformed according to God’s will. The title of this sermon has been borrowed for this article. King’s sermon is instructive because it shows that the transformation of humanity remains both a seemingly impossible task as well as the most important objective of all Christians. He reminds us that the command not to conform comes “not only from Paul, but also from our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, the world’s most dedicated nonconformist, whose ethical nonconformity still challenges the conscience of [humanity]” (King 1963:18). If one affirms the serious need for the ethical transformation of humanity, then one must begin to identify a specific methodology, strategy, or at the least some general parameters by which to evaluate the method of this transformation.

The primary sources for the reflections in this article, H. Richard Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture* and James Gustafson’s *Can Ethics Be Christian?* are the works of two Christian ethicists. I too have my theological grounding in the Christian church. Therefore, as I respond to Gustafson’s question, “Can ethics be Chris-

tian?" I cannot separate my Christian identity from my analytical mind and skills of reason. For me they are inextricably bound.

If our assumption is that we take the Christian approach to transformation, then what is so distinctive about Christian ethics? Can Christian ethics, as opposed to natural morality, make for a better world, leading us (as movie director/writer Spike Lee reflects) to "do the right thing?" These questions will guide the discussion between the positions of Niebuhr and Gustafson as well as prompt contributions from other voices. Finally, transformation must be defined not only in terms of form or appearance, but more significantly in terms of condition, character, and how one functions in and relates to society.

THE SEARCH FOR THE TRANSFORMED NONCONFORMIST

Most people, and Christians in particular, are thermometers that record or register the temperature of majority opinion, not thermostats that transform and regulate the temperature of society. (King 1963:19)

In *Christ and Culture*, H. Richard Niebuhr suggests a shift from the traditional discussion of the tension between Christianity and civilization to the relation between Christ and culture (1975:11). Both serve as authoritative sources in our world, but often they cannot be reconciled as they bring various responses in our quest to transform this world and ourselves. "When Christianity deals with the question of reason and revelation, what is ultimately in question is the relation of the revelation in Christ to the reason which prevails in culture" (Niebuhr 1975:11).

Those who have studied the life of Christ may wonder why culture, particularly Christian culture, has often rejected many of the admonitions and affirmations of Jesus Christ. Some, both in Christian and non-Christian communities, have rejected Christ (and therefore Christian ethics) because "they saw in him a threat to their culture" (Niebuhr 1975:4). Some antagonists suggest that he induces humanity "to rely on the grace of God instead of summoning them to human achievement" (Niebuhr 1975:6).

Perhaps to say that we are willing to be ethical beings, specifically ethical *Christian* beings, means that we must be, to a certain extent, “imitators” of Christ. In spite of boisterous affirmations about our outstanding ethical lives, we commonly find it difficult to forgive others. “The forgiveness that Christ practices and teaches is said to be irreconcilable with the demands of justice or the free man’s sense of moral responsibility” (Niebuhr 1975:9).

From the beginning, Christians have struggled in their attempts to combine the moral claims of Christ with those of society. For H. R. Niebuhr, these very claims especially as they are actually exhibited in the virtues of his life, define Jesus Christ as the Son of God. “The distinctiveness of Jesus’ ethic . . . lies in the radicality of his faith in God, including both his trust in and his loyalty to his Heavenly Father. . . . Jesus Christ is the moral authority of Christians” (1983:79).

In seeking ethical transformation in the world (or even within ourselves), the Christian must necessarily begin with Christ. The Christian lives as one who “belongs to that community . . . for whom Jesus Christ—his life, words, deeds, and destiny—is of supreme importance as the key to the understanding of themselves and their world” (Niebuhr 1975:11).

Within Christian theology it is possible to view Christians as passive people who rely too heavily on Christ, or rather do not assume enough responsibility for their own actions. James Gustafson disagrees with this assumption. “Persons are not merely passive chips floating on rivers of events and circumstances and carried by whatever currents flow. Rather they are agents, or actors. They have capacities that can be exercised in accordance with moral purposes, moral rules, moral values, moral ends” (Gustafson 1975:12).

For Niebuhr, the primary question of ethics might be phrased specifically in terms of divine action: What is God doing? Gustafson instead asks, “What is God enabling and requiring me (or us) to be and to do?” (Gustafson 1975:156). Thus Gustafson’s focus is more on the actions of humanity and the possibility of human autonomy. Both Niebuhr and Gustafson would agree with Clinton

Gardner that “the very possibility of *good* human action presupposes the priority of the continuing divine initiative in salvation and the present sovereignty of God over creation” (1983:82).

Again we ask, Why should we try to lead a life based on Christian ethics? What is the contribution to the world if one lives a moral life and employs moral reasoning? Niebuhr’s essay *The Responsible Self* (1963) gives us further insight. He posits that Christian ethics is the effort of the Christian community to criticize its moral action by means of reflection. It is of great significance that critical inquiry is not simply the attempt or process of moral self-judgment based in one’s community but rather an inquiry into the nature and principles of the Christian community’s moral life. As Niebuhr remarks, “Ethics helps us to understand ourselves as responsible beings, our world as the place in which the responsible existence of the human community is exercised” (Niebuhr 1963:18).¹

For Niebuhr “responsibility” is the primary form of moral action. In fact, “the fundamental structure of moral activity is most adequately defined in terms of responsibility” (1983:78). Gustafson contributes a helpful analogy to the model of natural law in the discussion of an individual’s “style” regarding moral decision making or moral activity:

In the natural law tradition, one would seek to determine what universally applicable principles and what second order principles fit the circumstances in hand. . . . In the common law tradition, one would seek for precedents in previous experience of one’s community which were set in the process of making judgments, deciding, and acting in cases similar to the one in hand. From these precedents one would find guidance in determining what ought to be done in the present time and place. (Gustafson 1975:18)

¹ Cf. King 1963:18: “Every true Christian is a citizen of two worlds, the world of time and the world of eternity. We are, paradoxically, in the world and yet not of the world. . . . [Paul] points to the responsibility of Christians to imbue an unchristian world with the ideals of a higher and more noble order.”

Whether we refer to groups or individuals, response occurs through the interpretation of the meaning of actions upon us. As we interpret those actions and then respond, we are held accountable for our actions and called to recognize the “universality of the community of moral interaction” (1983:79). We are called to recognize “social solidarity” (Niebuhr 1963:65).

The distinctive nature of the Christian community and thus of Christian ethics is supported not only by Jesus Christ but by Scripture, whose “authority is inescapable without being absolute” (Niebuhr 1963:22). The Bible assists us as we seek validation for the judgments and action of our Christian community and its members. It bears the story of our faith and our history, and reveals to us a God who calls us in love to a covenantal relationship. The Christian looks to Scripture as a “corroborative authority.” As Niebuhr suggests, “the church stands alongside of the Bible as an authority, but it also stands under the Bible” (Niebuhr 1963:22).

The Christian community is often accused of believing itself to be “better” than the rest of the world. Some of the insensitive destruction and ridiculing of foreign countries, people, and cultures in the name of Christian missionary work serve as reasons for this accusation. We must never forget that “the Christian community is as capable of false rationalizations, of perverted and distorted purposes, as any other community. The Bible, as the court of validation, aids the Church in eliminating its perversities, and verifying its true purposes” (Niebuhr 1963:24).

The individual whose moral actions exhibit the failure to apply insights inherent to Christian theology may believe that certain members of society (perhaps due to their inhumane actions against humanity or nature) are inherently evil. This may lead one to condemn persons with evil natures and intentions. However, in the Christian faith and life, where God is recognized as the creator of all things, one cannot come to such a conclusion. Niebuhr’s axiom, “whatever is, is good” (1963:30), suggests that whether we are righteous or sinful, “we are valued by God, just as the rest of creation is; thus we are free to love the goodness of the world

without being preoccupied with our own value” (Niebuhr 1963:30). “We are not to be preoccupied with our rightness or wrongness, with self-justification, but with our duty in view of what God is doing” (Gustafson 1975:126).

As we seek to interpret Christian ethics, we realize that any reflections on our existence as Christians are based on the symbolic form of Christ. Jesus Christ becomes the symbolic figure without which the Christian can no longer imagine, or know, or believe in—the “Determiner of Destiny.” Jesus Christ is the final end, ultimate source, or last environment to which God is related in all God’s relations (Gustafson 1975:162).

Niebuhr asks if the Christ symbol is the only true and adequate form for Christians and thus the source of our ethical reflections and actions. Gustafson would reply that without a doubt we cannot interpret the Christian life without reference to the Christ symbol (Gustafson 1975:161). In an earlier text, Gustafson suggested that Christ is the “central theological norm of Christian ethics” (1968:256–271). In fact, it is through Christ that humanity is able to discern what God is enabling and requiring in the world (cf. 1975:156–160, for a more thorough explanation). In terms of our moral actions, Christ serves as the model to follow. Through the narratives of Scripture regarding the life and activities of Christ, our Christian ethics is informed as to what we, as followers of Christ, “ought to be and do.”

In further reflections, Gustafson suggests that “the ends toward which action is directed are crucial; improper ends misdirect activities with reference to the well-being of persons, culture, societies, and nature” (1975:114).² As Christians, we imitate God’s love for us by loving our neighbors. Thus, “the theme of the

²Part of the uniqueness of King’s theology was his use of philosophical themes in the civil rights movement. He identifies the idea of means and ends as foundational to the nonviolent movement. “Over the last few years I have consistently preached that nonviolence demands that the means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek. So I have tried to make it clear that it is wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends. But now I must affirm that it is just as wrong, or even more so, to use moral means to preserve immoral ends. . . . T. S. Eliot has said that there is no greater treason than to do the right deed for the wrong reason” (King 1986b:301).

imitation of God is a central one" (Gustafson 1975:115). In whatever form we interpret Christian ethics, Christ bears a double character. In him humanity is directed toward God. In him also God is directed toward humanity.

FAITH AND REVELATION

Often the beliefs an individual holds serve to indicate the kinds of actions one may or may not commit. Gustafson suggests that there is a difference between "beliefs and believing." For a myriad of reasons, "all beliefs are not believed in with the same degree of intensity" (Gustafson 1975:38).

Let us cite, as does Gustafson, the well-known American affirmation of the United States Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." If this affirmation were indeed a central ethical claim firmly entrenched in the heart of the American character, there would have been no need for the revolutionary civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s. There would be no need for programs of affirmative action. Groups which espouse theories of race supremacy would be ignored if not outlawed. Although basic to the American, or at least to Christians of the West, "not all [found] that belief to be significant enough to orient their actions toward others, to develop their stance toward social institutions, and to bother to bring it to bear on particular decisions" (Gustafson 1975:39).³

³ King was also led to wonder why, if such a truth regarding the equality of humanity had been revealed to the early American Fathers, it was still being ignored by men and women who claimed allegiance to Christ. In "I Have A Dream" he said, "When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was the promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note in so far as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check; a check which has come back marked 'insufficient funds.' We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation" (1986:217).

Earlier I referred to the authority of the Bible as a source for understanding humanity's moral calling. One might say that revelation is the first step toward the transformation of culture. This being the case, it is imperative that we recall the primary issues in Niebuhr's *The Meaning of Revelation*. First, self-defense is the most prevalent source of error in all thinking, perhaps especially in theology and ethics. Second, the great source of evil in life is the absolutizing of the relative, which in Christianity takes the form of substituting religion, revelation, church, or Christian morality for God. Third, Christianity is a "permanent revolution," or *metanoia*, which does not come to an end in this world, this life, or this time.

What then is revelation? And how does it affect Christian ethics? Christian theology must necessarily begin with revelation, "meaning by that word simply historic faith" (Niebuhr 1941:16). Therefore, when we speak of revelation we are not attempting to relive the past but rather to use knowledge of the past to help us deal in a Christian way with problems of the present and future.

The use of this knowledge of the past should not suggest that Christians or Christian ethics are morally superior to any other peoples or their ethical grounding. Only God can make this judgment. "The proper stance of the Christian community in its ethical reflection is self-criticism and repentance, not pride and aggrandizement. Christian ethics starts with Christian beliefs" (Niebuhr 1963:14).

Niebuhr asks an excellent rhetorical question early in *The Meaning of Revelation*. Does not the re-establishment of a theology of revelation mean the renewal of a fruitless warfare between faith and reason (1941:3)? Here he begins to explain why revelation has become such a pressing issue for Christians and for Christian ethics. It is because one's beliefs about revelation both shape and reflects one's perspective on life in the world.

The old Indian proverb, "Don't criticize your brother/sister until you've walked a mile in his/her moccasins," may help to clarify one of Niebuhr's central points. People realize "they cannot understand what others are trying to communicate by words

and signs unless they try first of all to occupy the same standpoint, to look in the same direction and to use the same instruments of measurement and analysis, subject to the same conditions, as those which the original observer occupies, regards and uses” (1941:9).

Historical-critical study of the Bible within the last hundred years has certainly agreed with Niebuhr. One must not only study the words or the text in relation to our present; one must also try to place oneself in the time of the writer. Indeed, not only religion, but political and economic theories are infected and affected by the historical culture in which they exist. Niebuhr’s method of progressing from the past to the present and reflecting on possibilities of the future simply affirms his belief that if reason is to operate at all, it must be content to work as an historical reason. “To be in history is to be in society” (1941:15).

We must always remember that the history to which we refer in our discussion of revelation is not simply a long, boring record of insignificant events arranged in chronological sequence. “It is one thing to perceive from a safe distance the occurrences in a stranger’s life and quite a different thing to ponder the path of one’s own destiny” (1941:44).

One might understandably question how history, or more specifically, Christian history, contributes to the never-ending ethical transformation of culture. “When we speak of revelation in the Christian church we refer to our history, to the history of selves or to history as it is lived and apprehended from within” (1941:44). As members of the Christian community, the parables of Jesus, the miracle stories, Christ’s birth in a manger, the account of David as shepherd and king, Jonah in the mouth of the whale, and Moses crossing the Red Sea are all *our* story. More to the point, these revelatory accounts show God’s constant loving intervention and intercession in our lives. When one reflects upon this awesome history of our community, it is easy to wonder why the ethical transformation which God wishes for our lives has not already occurred.

It is important to remember that *transformation* does not suggest a condition of finality. The history which concerns us is not external history, or the history of the “exoteric historian,” or the “naive chronicler.” Instead we focus our attentions on internal history where “our time is our duration. . . . Relations here are not external but internal so that we are our relations and cannot be selves save as we are members of each other. When there is strife in this community there is strife and pain in us and when it is at peace we have peace in ourselves” (Niebuhr 1941:50–52). As Gustafson reminds us, revelation and the continuing “process of interpretation takes place under changing historical, social, and personal conditions” (1975:142).

It is in and through Jesus Christ that the call to moral action is clarified. “I can do all things in him who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13). Christ is not a point of reference to the non-Christian. Thus, the distinction must be made that as members of the Christian community we can constantly look to Jesus “in whom we see the righteousness of God, his power and wisdom” (1941:69). When we confront the revelatory events in our lives and history, “we can begin to think and act as members of an intelligible and intelligent world of persons” (1941:69). When we reason on the basis of revelation, when we choose whether we will love our neighbor or hate that same neighbor, “the heart not only understands what it remembers, but is enabled and driven to remember what it had forgotten” (1941:83).

Telling and retelling the story is a necessary part not only of Christian ethics, but of the conversation between Christians and non-Christians. Here again I turn to an example from American history. The typical high school history book indicates that the African slave trade began in 1619 as the first people of color were brought to this country. Although such hardships as oppression, rape, murder, denial of human dignity, as well as the destruction of civilizations, customs, and folklore all occurred because of the slave trade, many Western authors have sought to justify these actions for the larger economic interests of the newly developing

country (America). But we cannot forget (and we must actively recall) the “unremembered past,” as Richard Bondi charges in his interpretation of King’s sermon. “It was the leadership of other people before him in the Body of Christ that enabled King to lead as he did, for they kept alive the story that gave him a compelling destination and the courage to keep striding toward it” (1989:65). In the following statement, H. Richard Niebuhr points in a similar direction.

When we live and act in accordance with our inward social constitution in which there are class and race divisions, prejudices, assumptions about the things we can and cannot do, we are constrained by the unconscious past. . . . The ghosts of our fathers and of the selves that we have been haunt our days and nights though we refuse to acknowledge their presence. The revelatory event resurrects this buried past. (1941:83)

ETHICAL CHRISTIANS AND CHRISTIAN ETHICISTS

Niebuhr suggests that before reconciliation in the present can take place, before we can achieve community with humankind, and before ethical transformation can occur, we must (through Jesus Christ) “turn again to history, making the sins and the faiths of [our] fathers and brothers [our] own faiths and sins” (1941:86). In the process of making the history of the past and present our own, revelation stands out as a moving thing. “God who revealed himself continues to reveal himself” (1941:99).

Earlier we looked at the difference between beliefs and believing. Gustafson asks several serious questions which are quite helpful in testing any claims to distinctiveness in Christian ethics.

Are there ever occasions when the religious belief that justifies or perhaps determines moral action cannot be converted into a moral principle that excludes the particularities of that religious belief? Are there moral actions that are mandatory for religious persons *only for* ‘religious’ or ‘Christian’ reasons and not for reasons on

which all rational persons could presumably agree?
(Gustafson 1975:146)

It has been a long-standing assumption in the Christian tradition that moral values and principles can “somehow” be derived from religious beliefs. If we seek to understand (as Niebuhr asks) what God is doing, we look to the source where God has revealed what God does. We look to the Bible. But we must remember that the power and constant relativity of the Bible is lost if we suggest that it is merely a book of moral rules, or “a source for drawing rational inferences” (Gustafson 1975:149).

If we again refer to Niebuhr’s axiom “whatever is, is good,” we can begin to qualify the distinctiveness of Christian ethics. Niebuhr’s axiom is based on the notion that “God does what is morally right for, or morally beneficial to, the human community” (Gustafson 1975:149).

Scripture, however, is not the only source for one gaining insight into what God’s will is, or what is morally right and good. Creation itself can be understood as a source of moral values and principles. And the morality Scripture teaches is, on the whole, a confirmation of the morality inherent to creation. Thus, there is a legitimate claim to reflection upon the natural law or on the orders of creation.

Gustafson reminds us that according to Martin Luther’s ethics, “the Christian has no privileged position from which to know what ought to be done in ordering social, economic, and political life” (1975:151). It seems that any reasonable person should be able to agree on what is morally required of humanity by reflecting on the orders of creation.⁴ Christians, however, are called to go one step further.

They have a new inner disposition, and in grateful response to God’s redeeming love for them, they meet, in love, the neighbor’s deepest need. . . . [In the

⁴Unfortunately this is not always the case. Some Lutheran theologians especially have interpreted the orders of creation in ways that run counter to the conversionist approach.

Christian community,] obligations are not merely 'religious' obligation; they are also moral obligations within a 'way of life' to which the Christian is called. (Gustafson 1975:151–153)

Finally, let us return to Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*. One of the models presented by Niebuhr refers to Christ as the "transformer of culture." The men and women who support this "conversionist" answer to the problem of Christ and culture are part of a great tradition of the church. Significantly, they realize the distinction between

God's work in Christ and man's work in culture, [but] do not take the road of exclusive Christianity into isolation from civilization. . . . Though they accept their station in society with its duties in obedience to their Lord, they do not seek to modify Jesus Christ's sharp judgment of the world and all its ways. . . . They discern how all cultural work in which men promote their own glory, whether individualistically or socially, whether as members of the nation or of humanity, lies under the judgment of God—who does not seek His own profit. . . . Yet they believe also that such culture is under God's sovereign rule, and that the Christian must carry on cultural work in obedience to the Lord. (Niebuhr 1975:190f)

The conversionist affirms that culture is under the sovereign rule of God and maintains a hopeful and positive attitude toward society. "Christian ethics neither absolutizes the revealed moral law (imperatives and values) nor rejects it because it is culturally conditioned. Rather, Christian ethics results in "a great conversion of the power, spirit and content of the law" (1983:81).

The conversionist has an "awareness of the power of the Lord to transform all things by lifting them up to himself" (Niebuhr 1975:195). The person and work of Christ thus center in the redemption of individuals, of communities, and of all there is. "History is the story of God's mighty deeds and of man's response

to them. The eschatological future has become for him an eschatological present” (Niebuhr 1975:195).

Reason is transformed by revelation. “It can be said that in general [the apostle] John’s interest is directed toward the spiritual transformation of man’s life in the world, not toward the substitution of a wholly spiritual existence for a temporal one” (Niebuhr 1975:204). Thus, the Christian and particularly the Christian ethicist must take an active role to be in the world while “not of the world” (John 17:16).

King saw the necessity for Christ to transform culture at every step—as he suffered many frustrations and abuses under the Daley political machine in Chicago, as he scribbled notes on pieces of newspaper while incarcerated in a Birmingham jail, as he prepared for the writing and oral presentation of his famous *I Have A Dream* speech, and even in his decision to defy the court-ordered injunction which sent him to the jail cells of Birmingham. In King’s sermon, “Transformed Nonconformist,” “he aimed Paul’s remark at ministers, at the institutional church, and at the members of Christian congregations. He urged a return to the nonconformity of the early Christians, transformed by the gospel to judge themselves and the world by a new standard. And he warned of the dire consequences of failure in this effort at transforming the ministry of all Christians” (Bondi 1989:60). But King was not the first Christian to profess this belief in transformation.

The interpretation of Augustine as the theologian of cultural transformation by Christ is in accord with his fundamental theory of creation, fall, and regeneration, with his own career as pagan and Christian, and with the kind of influence he has exercised on Christianity . . . Augustine not only describes, but illustrates in his own person, the work of Christ as converter of culture. (Niebuhr 1975:208)

“Men, Maurice understood, were social by nature; they had no existence save as sons, brothers, members of community” (Niebuhr 1975:221). Perhaps King’s critics were correct in accus-

ing him of moving towards socialist thought. Perhaps this is one form of what Niebuhr meant when saying that “man’s sin is that he tries to be God to himself” (1975:223). But it cannot be debated that Augustine, King, and Maurice were each alike in that their words and lives were reflective of the belief that “the kingdom of God is transformed culture, because it is first of all the conversion of the human spirit from faithlessness and self-service to the knowledge and service of God” (Niebuhr 1975:228).

Before drawing conclusions, some final observations on transformation may be in order. I find Niebuhr’s conversionist theory to be extremely beneficial in my own attempt to understand the distinctiveness of Christian ethics. Its understanding of the person and work of Christ, the existence of evil and sin in the world, the transformation of law by love, and the mission to obey the state, yet correct it, are all principles which rule my life. Human sin as expressed in pride, greed, and prejudice has so thoroughly compromised the human condition that transformation as announced and made possible by Christ is essential to the survival of humanity.

The Christian life begins in transformation. That is sometimes a hard message for contemporary Christians to hear. What was a religion of conversion has become for many an accident of history, not something that irrupts into our lives but a condition we were born into along with our parents’ social class and political affiliation. (1989:60)

Although sin exists universally for both Niebuhr and Gustafson, they conclude that human nature is fundamentally good, but more in an ontological than a moral sense. They assert that “moral norms and values are understood in relational rather than abstract or perfectionist terms” (1983:151). This leads one to conclude that the possibility for the transformation of both communities and individuals certainly exists. As Clinton Gardner puts it,

For H. Richard Niebuhr, such transformation is made possible by a conversion from social or pluralistic faith to radical monotheism. . . . For Gustafson, the fundamental change which faith makes possible is the transformation of character, including a commitment to the well-being of creation and the common good. (1983:151)

Niebuhr, Gustafson, King, and Augustine would all agree that while the transformation of community is a very real event, the process itself is far from complete.

In the writings of Niebuhr and Gustafson we find two interesting similarities in their understanding of community. Both affirm that

there is more room for human freedom and a larger role for goods, virtue, and responsibility in the moral relationships of community life. In the second place . . . [they] have given primary attention to the moral relationships upon which community is based rather than to particular moral issues in politics, economics, and the family. (1983:170)

Richard Bondi offers his own reflections as to why humankind, particularly the Christian community, seems to struggle against God's intention for the ethical transformation of all creatures.

The real reason the message of transformation is hard to hear is that it asks us to be subject to constant change. It tells us that however the world once was, we can count on the new world to be different. However we once judged others and ourselves, we must adopt a new standard, that of Christ, for the future. (1989:60)

In an earlier reference to Romans 12:2, Bondi informs us that "transformation is both a mandate and a challenge." It is this "continual transformation [which] is required to keep the

people of God moving toward the destination of their hearts” (1989:60–62).

In our search for the transformed nonconformist, the operative question has been, Can Christian ethics be transforming, or can transforming ethics be Christian? From James Gustafson we learn that Christ is the ordered of creation and that in him all ethics are sanctioned (cf. 1975:170–172 for a more thorough explanation). “The Christian community has its significant grounding in a historical event, and its history and conduct are to be determined by that historical revelation” (1989:171).

Gustafson summarizes his reflections on Christian ethics in the following manner. “*Christian* ethics is highly distinctive, though not unique in all respects, and to be Christian is to be obliged to follow the distinctive as well as the ordinary morality that is part of a Christian way of life” (1975:172). The primary question of ethics for Gustafson is, “What is God enabling and requiring us to be and do?”

Niebuhr concludes that transformation is God’s possibility, not humanity’s. It is God’s working grace that makes the radical action of humanity’s conversion possible.

There is certainly something very distinctive about Christian ethics, from the days of Jesus’ life through today. Christians are called to moral leadership, ethical reflection, and service to humanity, following the model of Jesus Christ. It may help us if we remember that these obligations are “perhaps less of a threat and more of a challenge if we remember that the church is neither the world nor the reign of God, but something suspended between them, whose relative movement we can and must affect as those called by God to love” (Bondi 1989:62).

REFERENCES

Bondi, Richard

- 1989 *Leading God's People: Ethics for the Practice of Ministry.* Nashville: Abingdon.

Gardner, E. Clinton

- 1983 *Christocentrism in Christian Social Ethics: A Depth Study of Eight Modern Protestants.* Lanham: University Press of America.

Gustafson, James M.

- 1968 *Christ and the Moral Life.* New York: Harper & Row.
1975 *Can Ethics Be Christian?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

King, Martin Luther, Jr.

- 1963 *Strength To Love.* Philadelphia: Fortress.
1986a "I Have a Dream." In *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Ed. James Melvin Washington. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
1986b "Letter from Birmingham County Jail." In *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Ed. James Melvin Washington. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Niebuhr, H. Richard

- 1941 *The Meaning of Revelation.* New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.
1963 *The Responsible Self.* New York: Harper & Row.
1975 *Christ and Culture.* New York: Harper & Row.

Meir Sternberg: Narrative Poetics and Biblical Ideology

DOUGLAS B. MILLER

Princeton Theological Seminary

INTRODUCTION

Some twenty years ago, Meir Sternberg began to publish his pioneering studies in the field of biblical poetics. Among the scholars giving attention to Hebrew narrative since then, few have been more provocative than Sternberg. He reproduces some of his best work in *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (1985), supplemented by new, more theoretically oriented essays. His stated focus here is upon “those narrative principles crucial to the marriage of ideology to reading that governs biblical poetics” (xi).

Sternberg’s flair for bold assertion and sophisticated exposition has aroused a variety of responses. While his literary analysis is widely respected, perhaps the most serious criticism aimed at his work is its failure to be self-conscious about its *own* ideology. The focus of the present essay, however, lies elsewhere. Based on his work with individual narratives, Sternberg has drawn some far-reaching conclusions about the Bible as a whole, and about its relationship to other world literature. I propose to challenge two of these conclusions, which concern the uniformity of biblical poetics and the uniqueness of the Bible’s ideology among other ancient literature. After a summary of Sternberg’s program, I will address these two issues, then conclude with a brief assessment.

OVERVIEW

As he sets forth in his introductory chapter, Sternberg approaches literary interpretation as a discernment of the rules of discourse by which a text has been constructed. "Source-oriented inquiry" and "discourse-oriented analysis," rather than being antithetical, need each other "to make sense of [the text's] discourse in terms of communication" (Sternberg 1985:15). He thus claims to be satisfied neither with a rigidly historical inquiry in interpretation, nor with those (he specifically mentions New Critics and structuralists) who would ignore a work's cultural context in favor of its literary design.¹

After discussing his approach theoretically, Sternberg goes on in chapters 2 and 3 to describe the conclusions he has reached regarding the Hebrew Bible. In brief, Sternberg maintains that biblical narrative is a multi-functional discourse regulated by a set of three principles which operate cooperatively: the ideological, historiographic, and aesthetic (1985:40). Furthermore, the Bible's composition is "foolproof" in that it is so structured as to impose its *ideology*—its singular message—upon all except the most stubborn of readers.² To accomplish this persuasion, the Bible employs a uniform and unique *poetics* throughout its narratives. In the remainder of his book, Sternberg garners support for his thesis by detailed explication of specific biblical texts.

IDEOLOGY AND POETICS

The Bible, then, contains a unique *ideology*, says Sternberg: God is omniscient, humanity's knowledge is limited, and the boundary between them is impassable. This, Sternberg says, is a "new

¹ However, his work has in common with structuralism and New Criticism the assumption that the text is coherent and finite, and an emphasis on the present form of the text rather than its origins. Further, the role of cultural context in his interpretation remains unclear.

² "By foolproof composition I mean that the Bible is difficult to read, easy to underread and overread and even misread, but virtually impossible to, so to speak, counterread" (1985:50).

doctrine" in the history of the world (1985:46). Moreover, the Bible has a precise goal: to "trap [the reader] into faith" (1985:99). The Bible accomplishes this primarily through its stories, continues Sternberg, and to do so, uses a *poetics* involving an omniscient narrator.³

This kind of narration has two very important advantages. First, the omniscient narrator is able to *manipulate the reader* by withholding information or giving it selectively. The reader participates in a "drama of knowledge," moving from the truth to the whole truth, and thus realizes his or her inadequacy.⁴ In contrast, it becomes obvious, the deity knew everything all the time.

The second benefit of omniscient narration is that it works to *ground the reader's confidence* concerning things related to God in the witness of a narrator whose omniscience, and hence reliability, is "equivalent to God's own" (1985:90).⁵ Thus a completely reliable witness reinforces the words and activities of the deity.

Sternberg thus claims that the Bible interrelates its poetics with its ideology. As he puts it, the Bible builds "the cognitive antithesis between God and humanity into the structure of the narrative" (1985:46). And here is the payoff for Sternberg: While the Bible persuades the reader that human knowledge is limited, its rhetoric makes the reader confident of the truths presented in these stories.

I turn now to challenge two of Sternberg's positions on the Bible as a whole. For the *poetics* of biblical narrative to operate as Sternberg has described, the Bible must have an omniscient, divinely inspired narrator. So I will explore, first, whether this is indeed the case for all the narratives in the Hebrew Bible. Second,

³ Biblical stories are constructed to persuade, yet they avoid "didacticism," says Sternberg. He lists various traits of "didacticism" and argues that the Bible successfully balances ideology, aesthetics, and history writing (1985:38).

⁴ Rather than taking up the issue of the oral vs. written character of the Bible's stories, I have simply referred to the audience as "reader" throughout this essay.

⁵ Sternberg grants that this move is logically circular, for the reliability of the narrator is based upon congruence with the omniscient deity which in turn is *provided* by the narrator. However, Sternberg says, this packs much power as a rhetorical strategy, and rhetoric never survives logical analysis anyway (1985:90).

I will inquire whether the Bible's *ideology* is unique among ancient literature on the two points Sternberg sets forth: a truly omniscient deity, and the distinction between God and humanity on the basis of knowledge.⁶

STERNBERG'S FIRST CLAIM

Sternberg's first claim is that the Bible uniformly employs an omniscient, divinely-inspired narrator. Omniscient narration, especially common in ancient literature, is generally understood to be a narrative voice which demonstrates no restriction of knowledge. Stated positively, an omniscient narrator often has privileged access to such things as (1) the distant past; (2) private scenes; and (3) the thoughts of the characters, including God (1985:12).

Of course, all that is discernible about the extent of the narrator's knowledge is based upon what the narrator presents. If the narrator shows some limitation, we conclude that the voice is *not* omniscient. Otherwise, by definition, the narrator is omniscient.

STERNBERG'S PROPOSAL

In assessing the role of the biblical narrator, Sternberg makes an additional distinction which he says is necessary to appreciate the biblical material. That distinction is between the *extent* of knowledge (limited or unlimited) which the narrator displays and the

⁶This essay does not deal with Sternberg's additional claim that the Bible's *poetics* is unique. Sternberg appears to base this claim on several considerations. First, he asserts that biblical poetics serves an ideological agenda in addition to an aesthetic one, neither of which compromises the other. This causes the functions of the omniscient biblical narrator to "differ from their equivalents outside the Bible, Oriental or Occidental, ancient or modern" (1985:87). Second, he contends that the Bible "created *ex nihilo* a poetics of ambiguity . . . in order to fix rather than blur the line of demarcation between heaven and earth: unless the reader undergoes the drama of knowledge himself, the whole tale will have been told in vain" (1985:166). Third, he contends that the Bible's narrator consistently establishes its credibility by presenting information accountable only through divine inspiration. Only the latter point is addressed in what follows.

source or *authority* of that knowledge (divine or human). These two factors suggest four potential categories of narrative voice: (1) unlimited-divine; (2) limited-human; (3) unlimited-human; and (4) limited-divine.

Sternberg insists that the first category is normative for the Bible. The “form of an inside view (or any other privileged information) must not be confused with its authority or warrant” (1985:87), says Sternberg. For this reason, omniscient biblical narration is carefully crafted to rule out possibilities for the narrator other than an omniscience equivalent to God’s own (1985:90)—that is, its authority is based upon inspiration (1985:85 and chap. 2).⁷ “As long as the context invites us to judge or explain the rendering of inner life in terms of probability, then even the trappings of omniscience may appear without its premises and force” (1985:87). The reader would be left with “a heaven-oriented interpretation of history by earthlings” (1985:90). The third category, therefore—unlimited-human—cannot be found in scripture. Sternberg does not entertain the possibility of the fourth category, limited-divine.

The *normative* biblical pattern for Sternberg, then, is one in which the narrator evidences knowledge of unlimited *extent*, but which has its source or *authority* in the *divine mind* itself. The key for Sternberg is that the narrator takes particular concern to present *information which is impossible or implausible on human terms alone*.⁸

Sternberg does, however, acknowledge one alternate pattern of narrative voice in the Hebrew canon, the second category above: limited-human. The book of Nehemiah and a portion of Ezra are given as eyewitness report. First person narration like this is not considered omniscient or unlimited because events are described from the perspective of a human being, usually—as here—a character in the story.

⁷ Sternberg warns that an omniscient narrator may feign limitations for rhetorical purposes and that *apparent* limitations of the deity in the Bible are “self-imposed and motivated, none permanent” (1985:181–185).

⁸ Robert Alter and others have not hesitated to ascribe to creative, artistic imagination those materials not available to human beings (Alter 1981:23–27).

Interestingly, however, these stories have elements which are normally associated with omniscient narration. In Nehemiah, the inner thoughts of the enemy are given on three occasions (2:10; 4:1; 6:2). And Ezra 8:23 states that Ezra's group prayed and that God heard the entreaty. Sternberg is careful to discount the possibility that this human narrative voice could have divinely privileged information.⁹ He says the narrators, reporting on what happened to them earlier, are simply giving information they either inferred, or have gained at a later time (1985:86–87).

The thesis in jeopardy for Sternberg here is the interrelationship of ideology and poetics. He needs an omniscient (and divinely inspired) narrator to ground the confidence of the reader, and a human narrator cannot be omniscient. So even though the narrator reveals no gaps of knowledge, he argues that this narration has a human authority base and is limited in extent. Thus Ezra and Nehemiah fit the pattern of category two. This is still a problem, but apparently less of one for him than an omniscient human narrator (category three). He explains it as a minor exception to the dominant rule and notes that these are "very late writings" (1985:13). A strategy of limited narration was employed in Ezra for reasons of "piety" and in Nehemiah because of "brevity, convention," and "the rhetoric of aspersion" (1985:87).

He thus concludes that strategies of biblical narration may be divided into two groups. On the one hand, we find narration *unlimited* in extent and *with* divine authority. On the other, there is a small bit of first-person, empirically grounded narration that is *limited* in extent and does *not* have divine authority (1985:61, 87). What is not in the Bible, Sternberg insists, are stories with unlimited narration that also have a plausibly empirical basis. Stories with unlimited narration will always go out of their way to demonstrate the narrator's divinely acquired knowledge. The situation according to Sternberg:

⁹The issue in question here is not whether divinely inspired information is available to characters in a story, for such is found throughout biblical narratives. Rather, the point concerns the narrative voice, one which Sternberg does not want confused with what he considers the normative biblical pattern.

	<i>Normative</i>	<i>Exception (Ezra/Nehemiah)</i>	<i>Not in Bible</i>
Extent:	unlimited	limited (first person)	unlimited
Authority:	divine	human	human

I wish to address at this point the dimension of authority. According to Sternberg, “the Bible . . . postulates a narrator with such free movement through time and space, the public and the private arena, that he invests his dramatizations with the authority of an omniscience equivalent to God’s own” (1985:90). On the other hand, the four passages in Ezra and Nehemiah listed above illustrate the kind of information which fails to qualify a narrator as having divine authority for Sternberg. A narrator who offers information at one point in the story, even private scenes or the thoughts of God, which later plays itself out or may be inferred in the course of the story, does not satisfy Sternberg’s requirements.

This determination leaves only three types of data the presentation of which would qualify a narrator as having divine authority: (1) events which occurred before human beings existed (e.g., the creation story); (2) activity in the divine realm which is reported only by the narrator and unknown to any of the characters (e.g., Job 1–2); and (3) certain thoughts, words, or actions of a character not available to a human witness (e.g., the death of Saul and his armor bearer), those which could not plausibly be reported later and so come to be known by anyone, including the narrator.¹⁰

These three types of information cannot be inferred nor be acquired later without divine aid. Thus their presence would, from Sternberg’s perspective, indicate an inspired narrator.¹¹ Every-

¹⁰ This episode has received much discussion due to the report of the Amalekite which follows in 2 Sam 1. Was there a human witness? It is possible that there was. But the Amalekite is portrayed as giving an account of Saul’s end different from that of the narrator in 1 Sam 31.

¹¹ It is in some cases difficult to determine what legitimately would qualify for item three. It is not clear, based on Sternberg’s treatment of Nehemiah and Ezra, just what could and could not plausibly be *inferred*. Could one rightly assume, knowing only the basic events, the motive given for Haman’s pleading with Esther

thing else can be accounted for by human means, and this, says Sternberg, the Bible cannot allow lest the audience doubt the narrator's divine authority.

ANOTHER BIBLICAL STRATEGY

Are Sternberg's two categories, unlimited-divine and limited-human narration, the only strategies employed in the Hebrew Bible? The book of Ruth tells the experiences of two faithful women who refuse to let a bad situation be the final chapter of their story. As to *extent* of knowledge, in the story of Ruth we unquestionably have "omniscient" rather than limited narration. The narrative voice is reliable and evidences no gaps of information. Private scenes are presented, along with a report of an inner motive (1:18).

However, regarding *authority*, does the narrator present any information which cannot be explained empirically? There are no scenes from the divine council, no reports of activity lacking a living witness who could have told it. Nothing in the story requires that the narrator be inspired by divine omniscience to account for the *source* of that information.

The reader is certainly given access to private conversation, such as the nocturnal meeting between Ruth and Boaz at the threshing floor. But just as with Ezra and Nehemiah, the story is told from a stance after the events. And as Sternberg grants for those two books, this tale could certainly have been based upon information inferred or gained at a later time, say from an interview with one of the leading characters.¹² The end of the book contains a brief

(Esth 7:7)? Sternberg's treatment of Ezra 8:23 also allows one to consign to inference much that a narrator attributes to God, such as pleasure or displeasure, and various of God's actions.

¹²The privileged information presented by the narrator in Ruth qualifies its narration as "omniscient." But the corresponding phenomena in the first-person narrator sections of Nehemiah and Ezra would not normally engender that label, since they report from a (human) character in the story. Thus, while this distinction is proper, it is worth noting that if Nehemiah and Ezra were narrated in third person, they would be of a kind with Ruth. If we awkwardly designate Nehemiah

announcement connecting Obed, the son of Ruth and Boaz, with the line of David. But the narrator does not prophesy this information. It is simply a notice, also in retrospect, indicating the further significance of the story's characters.

If we accept Sternberg's evaluation of Nehemiah and Ezra as limited-human narration, the story of Ruth evidences a third biblical narrative strategy (category three): narration which is unlimited in *extent*, but whose *authority* is easily accounted for on a human basis.

	<i>Sternberg's Normative</i>	<i>Ezra/Nehemiah</i>	<i>Ruth</i>
Extent:	unlimited	limited	unlimited
Authority:	divine	human	human

A second example of this type of narration is found in the book of Daniel. Certainly this book is full of expressions of divine inspiration. But the narrative voice itself does not make such a claim, tacitly or otherwise. The narrator in the book of Daniel is busy with the task of reporting the words and experiences of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, which happen to include interaction with the deity. But the *source* of the narrator's information is easily accounted for as reports passed along by human witnesses, e.g., from the main characters themselves.¹³

Once one takes into consideration inference and knowledge obtained later, principles which Sternberg introduces to account

and Ezra to be omniscient narration with empirical authority (category three), we must conclude that this category of biblical narrative includes more narratives than Sternberg allows, such as Ruth and others. I believe it is more satisfactory to conclude that we find three types of narration in the Hebrew Bible. Either way, Sternberg's proposal for a normative biblical narrative poetics becomes suspect.

¹³ The comment in 1:2 that the Lord gave Jehoiakim into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar (or in 1:9 that God granted Daniel favor in the sight of the Babylonian commander or in 1:17 that God gave them knowledge and intelligence) may be explained as an inference in retrospect (cf. Neh 8:23; Sternberg 1985:86). The statement in 5:6 that Belshazzar's thoughts alarmed him I take as a determination based upon his manifest behavior (cf. Neh 2:10; 4:1; 6:2; and the queen's similar determination in 5:10).

for Ezra and Nehemiah, numerous other biblical narratives can be explained without recourse to the type of inspirational authority Sternberg insists is normative in the Bible. Such examples include the Joseph story and some of the episodes in Joshua and Judges.¹⁴

In summary, then, Sternberg has claimed that two narrative strategies are found in biblical stories. The first is omniscient narration grounded in divine inspiration. The second, a minor one, is first-person report which is empirically grounded.¹⁵ I have suggested that *if* we assume Sternberg's distinctions regarding extent and authority (and for an inquiry into the Bible's persuasiveness this may be helpful), we actually find a third strategy in the books of Ruth, Daniel, and elsewhere. These stories have an omniscient narrator, but one whose authority can be explained in empirical terms.

STERNBERG'S SECOND CLAIM

We move now to the matter of ideology. Sternberg's second claim is that when the Bible presents an omniscient deity and draws the line between divinity and humanity on the issue of knowledge, it is unique among ancient literature. Although other ancient stories often employ an omniscient narrator, says Sternberg, this employment is not in the service of an ideology which (1) promotes an

¹⁴If we consider Yahweh's anger as inferred from events, Judg 4 (the Barak and Deborah story) and Josh 6 (the taking of Jericho) qualify. A consideration of these two books draws attention to Sternberg's neglect of form-critical concerns. He does not address the matter of the limits of a story or collection of narratives, nor does he hesitate to compare a large variety of texts under the category of "narrative" without regard for their social setting or possible function within it. Despite his professed concern, it is a question how a work's cultural-historical context in any way impacts the interpretive process for Sternberg. He finds all the clues for making sense of the biblical discourse within the text, where they have been awaiting discovery. Apparently, any requisite cultural-historical reconstruction is also available there.

¹⁵Notable also within the book of Daniel are the first-person reports of Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4 and Daniel's accounts of his visions in chapters 7–12. These and other examples of limited, empirically based narration (cf. Jer 32:8–17), demonstrate that the narrative strategy of Nehemiah and Ezra is more pervasive than Sternberg suggests.

omniscient deity; and (2) distinguishes humanity from the gods on the basis of mortality (1985:12, 88).

One might profitably address here the Bible's own uniformity on these two issues.¹⁶ I propose, rather, to test Sternberg's charge against other literature by examining one narrative from among the literature of Ugarit: the *Kirta* (or *Keret*) epic. In a brief treatment of characterization, I will evaluate first how the deity is portrayed, and second, the contrast drawn between divinity and humanity.

CHARACTERIZATION OF THE DEITY

This Ugaritic tale comprises three episodes. The first episode begins with Kirta, a Canaanite king, in remorse over his lack of a spouse and offspring. After falling asleep from sorrow, the supreme god El descends in a dream and tells him precisely what he must do to remedy his problem. Kirta obeys, and attains a wife and children. The second episode finds Kirta ill, likely due to his failure to fulfill a vow to the goddess Asherah. El again provides the answer by creating a minor deity who heals Kirta. In the third episode, which is incomplete, Kirta is charged with neglecting his royal responsibilities. We can only speculate about the remainder of the plot here and what El's role might have been.¹⁷

¹⁶Sternberg proposes that in the Hebrew Bible, any indication of the deity's limitation is overwhelmed by the overall rhetorical effect (1985:180–181; cf. Fretheim 1985). On the second theme, "divinity distinguished from humanity on the basis of *knowledge*," the pervasiveness among biblical stories is also questionable. In the book of Ruth, human distinction from the deity on any basis does not seem to be an issue. In Ezra and Nehemiah, the point of distinction would seem to be holiness more than knowledge. Furthermore, in some stories that *do* have superior divine wisdom as a theme, such as those of Daniel and Joseph (which at other points Sternberg explicates well), the narrator does not fulfill Sternberg's qualifications for having divine authority.

¹⁷David Damrosch (1985:51–87) discusses ancient Near Eastern epic in his treatment of genre transformations in ancient Near Eastern literature. He concludes that ancient Near Eastern myth or mythic epic, with its concern for existential issues and poetic form, began to assimilate some of the features of historical writing. The resulting genre, which he calls "historical epic," could be written in prose as well as poetry. This hybrid form was involved in an "explicit

Analyses of the god El in Ugaritic literature have been closely attentive to characterization. El's acquiescence to the goddess Anat in the story of *Aqht*, for instance, results in a portrait of weakness. Most efforts have attempted to construct a composite picture from the various stories involving El. For example, determinations have been made of his declining status in the face of Baal's ascendancy (cf. Miller 1967 and Pope 1987). One recent commentator generalizes that "in Ugaritic literature, El is both a comical and pathetic figure" (Margalit 1989:480).

However, such evaluations are founded upon what can be determined from each text individually. How is El depicted in the *Kirta* epic itself? The answer to this is complicated by the fact that several of the tablets are damaged. However, there are no indications that El is limited in power or knowledge. As Simon Parker notes, Kirta's weakness here "displays the sufficiency of El's grace" (1989:213). Although the three episodes evidence some historical development, according to Parker their present form accentuates "the unique benevolence, wisdom and power of El. . . . While the first narrative exposes [Kirta's] total dependence on El, the second explores the inadequacy of others in [Kirta's] world to accomplish anything without El" (Parker:211–212). The knowledge and power of El are developed in part by near-verbatim repetition, from El's charge to Kirta, to the account of Kirta's obedience, to the record of the expedition's successful conclusion.¹⁸

process of separation from divine culture and divine ways of acting" which had been found in the ancient mythic epics (1985:93). The *Gilgamesh Epic* exemplifies a transitional stage between the two forms. Historical epic retained the concern for existential issues, while developing a more complex understanding of character and causality, and distancing itself from the divine realm. Damrosch finds Frank Moore Cross' division of genre according to the participation of deity (epic) or lack thereof (history) inadequate to the complexity of ancient Near Eastern forms (cf. Cross 1973:viii). See also the discussion of epic by Adele Berlin (1984).

¹⁸It might be noted that El descends in Kirta's dream to discover the reason for his weeping. However, if this is an indication that El must investigate in order to discover something he doesn't know, the same must also be said for Yahweh, who, in Gen 11, descends to investigate the tower construction at Babel. The urging

In short, El is characterized as completely adequate in regard to knowledge. Within the polytheistic context of Ugarit, El as high god over lesser gods functions much as does Yahweh in monotheistic Israel, over its less-than-divine but super-human beings. Within the boundaries of this narrative, it would not be inappropriate to declare El omniscient.

DIVINITY AND HUMANITY CONTRASTED

The second major issue for the *Kirta* story addressed here pertains to the dividing line between divinity and humanity. The contrast between the high god El and those beneath him is at least one concern of the text. Both the first and second episodes display Kirta's own helplessness and the failure of minor deities, friends, and family to know what proper steps should be taken.

El alone knows the best way to proceed, whether the need is offspring or physical healing, and he alone can do it. While the matter of Kirta's apparently life-threatening illness raises the issue of mortality, it is a point subsumed under the larger question of Kirta's accountability for his vow to Asherah, and El's knowledge and ability to aid Kirta in his difficulty. In the *Kirta* story, if the line is to be drawn anywhere between El on one side and all humans and other deities on the other, it is on the basis of knowledge coupled with power.¹⁹

which El receives from lesser deities to act on Kirta's behalf is simply that: he is prodded to action, not given information he does not already have. As far as the *Kirta* epic is concerned, El is wise and all-knowing.

¹⁹ The issue of the dividing line between divinity and humanity is complicated in this epic by the uncertainty of Kirta's ontological status. For example, El is designated as Kirta's father (A, i, 39–42). Also, in the midst of his illness, Kirta's children question whether he will die "like a mortal" (C, i, 3–4, 10–11, 22). Scholarship is currently divided on this issue (cf. Margalit 1989:45 and Parker 1989:213). Are the references to his kinship with the gods part of the political myth of his rule, or is he truly regarded as a demi-god? Mortals, it is clear, may die, while gods do not. The fact that El descends to Kirta and communicates with him through a dream, along with every impression that Kirta's illness is a genuine threat to his life, would seem to indicate that his existence takes place among the mortals and that he is at most partially divine.

In summary, the Ugaritic *Kirta* epic has the two traits which Sternberg claims to be unique to the ideology of the Hebrew Bible: an omniscient deity and a division between deity and humanity on the basis of knowledge.²⁰

A further point of interest concerns poetics. The narrator in the *Kirta* story has traits which Sternberg considers to be normative for the poetics of the Hebrew Bible. That is, the narrator is omniscient not only in *extent* of knowledge, but divine *authority* is evident since the narrator is able to report on scenes from the divine council.²¹

CONCLUSION

This essay has examined two of the general theses Sternberg presented in his book. Regarding the Bible's ideology, we have seen an example of a text outside the Bible which has an omniscient deity and which makes a division between God and humanity on the basis of knowledge. The Bible is thus not alone among ancient literature in the ideological elements that Sternberg highlights.

As for poetics, I argued that if one assumes Sternberg's distinctions, the Bible is not dominated by one normative strategy, but has at least three styles of narrative voice, all well-represented. Sternberg's program cannot succeed across the Bible as a whole because the rhetorical instrumentation he requires does not occur in all the stories.

It should not be surprising to find a diversity of narrative styles within the canon (the biblical books of Ruth and Daniel do not fit Sternberg's normative schema for biblical poetics). Nor should it be surprising to discover cultural antecedents for the Bible's

²⁰ Further evidence of a concern for the issue of knowledge in texts of the ancient Near East is presented by Damrosch who finds a dynamic of knowledge and concealment in the late form of the *Gilgamesh Epic* (1987:93–102). This would suggest that Sternberg's claim for an "epistemological revolution" (Sternberg 1985:88) within the Hebrew tradition alone is overstated.

²¹ I have not tried to make a case that the *Kirta* story seeks the same goals as Sternberg claims for biblical narrative, nor have I compared the sophistication of its poetics with that of the Bible. Two additional evidences for omniscient narration in the *Kirta* story are the presentation of private conversation among the enemy royalty of Udm, and its complete ease of movement through space.

ideology. (The *Kirta* epic does fit his program's ideology, and its poetics as well.)

As for biblical poetics, however, we should note that even though, in Sternberg's terms, divinely inspired omniscient narration is frequently absent, the narrative voice always does prove to be reliable. This leaves us with two questions. First, could it be that several varieties of reliable narration are able to accomplish the impact Sternberg proposes for the Bible on the reader? He does not think so, but the issue is worth investigation.

Second, might Sternberg's program succeed at the level of specific texts? If we can grant for a particular story that an omniscient deity and narrator are present, do we find the reader to be persuaded of the ideals which Sternberg finds within the agenda of the text? Does the reader participate in a drama of knowledge which convinces the reader of his or her proper place in relationship to the deity? Is the reader trapped into faith?

This concern for the impact of text on reader is at the heart of the modern controversy in literary theory. As alluded to above, scholars have taken Sternberg to task for the very concept of an ideal reader, and for a "foolproof" ideological impact on everyone who reads the stories sympathetically. If Sternberg is to continue his influence in biblical narrative studies, he will need to justify more adequately the outcome he envisions for the audience of biblical texts.²²

I will offer, in closing, a few suggestions for this ongoing discussion. A proper appreciation of biblical poetics, it seems to me, will recognize diverse rhetorical strategies within the Bible and the significance of each as an ideological tool. According to Sternberg, the biblical narrator "establishes himself in the strongest position conceivable" by wielding "the authority of supernatural knowledge and of empirical evidence, of inspiration (or convention) and tradition, of the divine performer and of the human observer, of the mentor and of the 'son' meeting other sons on their common ground" (1985:117). If we cannot find this

²² See the discussions of Sternberg's treatment of Genesis 34 by Naomi Segal (1988) and Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn (1991).

multiplexity woven into every narrative, as Sternberg would seem to have it, we can perhaps affirm its legitimacy across the canon as a whole.

Next, I would like to suggest a conception of the biblical narrator slightly different from Sternberg's. One legitimate way to read the Bible is in its role as a community document. The narrator is the community's voice, the audible treasury of the faith of Israel. It is the fireside story teller, now in a more permanent form.²³ The best analog for this voice is not that of the prophet, one privy to the divine mind, speaking by the side of God to the people, as with Sternberg's normative narrator (cf. 1985:12). A better comparison is to the scribe, one who lays out for future generations the testimony of God's people. Some of this testimony does speak on God's behalf, while some addresses the deity. And some does neither. All has been preserved to encourage and challenge the people of faith in their devotion to God, to one another, and to the world at large.

Finally, it may be helpful to view the narrator as one of several voices that contribute to the Bible's power to persuade. Not only does the narrator in Ezra and Nehemiah speak from empirical experience, so do prophets, singers, sages, and lawgivers, along with those faithful to their mothers-in-law and those who celebrate that faithfulness. The collective voice of the tradition proclaims through various mouthpieces what Yahweh has spoken and done in their existence.

Sternberg's assessment of the Bible's rhetoric is aimed at a particular epistemological dilemma: the scripture's use of human testimony to persuade the reader that human knowledge—and hence that very testimony—is fallible. Therefore he posits a divinely infallible narrator who could become the source of the reader's confidence. However, the essential reliability of the narrator, while not unique, is quite adequate to the scripture's persuasive task. Furthermore, I believe we must appreciate that the

²³ It is difficult to hold together this image of an actual human being telling stories with Sternberg's presentation of a divinely inspired, but disembodied, narrative voice. It seems implausible that in such a setting the narrator/story-teller would be conceived as inspired with knowledge available to no one else.

voices of the witnesses in scripture carry their own convincing power, a power derived from the truth of their message. While Sternberg is correct that the Bible’s narrative voice is crafted for persuasion, it is also shaped to fulfill a supportive role, to get out of the way of those whose testimony it bears.

REFERENCES

Alter, Robert
1981 *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. New York: Basic Books.

Berlin, Adele
1984 “Ethnopoetry and the Enmerkar Epics.” In *Studies in Literature from the Ancient Near East Dedicated to Samuel Noah Kramer*. Ed. Jack M. Sasson. New Haven: American Oriental Society.

Cross, Frank Moore
1973 *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University.

Damrosch, David
1987 *The Narrative Covenant: Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Fewell, Danna Nolan, and David M. Gunn
1991 “Tipping the Balance: Sternberg’s Reader and the Rape of Dinah.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110:193–211.

Fretheim, Terence
1985 “Divine Foreknowledge, Divine Constancy and the Rejection of Saul’s Kingship.” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47:595–602.

Margalit, Baruch
1989 *The Ugaritic Poem of AQHT*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

- Miller, Patrick D.
1967 "El the Warrior." *Harvard Theological Review* 60:411–431.
- Parker, Simon B.
1989 *The Pre-biblical Narrative Tradition*. Atlanta: Scholars Press.
- Pope, Marvin H.
1987 "The Status of El at Ugarit." *Ugaritica Forschungen* 19:219–230.
- Segal, Naomi
1988 Review of Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*. *Vetus Testamentum* 38:243–249.
- Sternberg, Meir
1985 *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*. Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Renewing the Ethic of the Eschatological Community: The Vision of Judgment in Matthew 25

DAVID A. DE SILVA

Emory University

The striking vision of the separation of the “sheep” and the “goats” concludes the last of Jesus’ discourses in Matthew’s Gospel and marks the final teaching of Jesus to his disciples. This vision presents several critical problems to the exegete. First, it is not clear to which genre it belongs. Is this a vision of the Last Judgment like the prophecies of chapter 24, or is it a parable? The two genres require different readings. Second, who are the characters in the story? Who qualifies as “one of the least of these my brothers” and what groups are included in πάντα τὰ ἔθνη?

TWO LINES OF THOUGHT

Interpretations in the last twenty years have tended to fall into one of two camps in the exegesis of this passage. (The hermeneutical moves are much more varied, some of which do not correspond to the exegesis on which they are presumably based.) The first group, represented by Gray, Lambrecht, Donahue, Oudersluys, and Court, hold that the parable refers to the judgment of “all the nations” on the basis of how they received the Christian missionaries. These missionaries would have suffered hunger, thirst, insufficient clothing, sickness, being a stranger, and imprisonment in their apostolic service (Oudersluys 1973:155).

One finds all these situations in the writings of Paul, who treats them as normal hardships. Court, Oudersluys, and Donahue appeal to the *shaliach* pattern in Pharisaic thought, in which the sent one represents the sender in close identification. Thus they explain the words “insofar as you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” in these terms (Court 1985:231). Lambrecht and Gray read in the doing or not doing of these works to the missionaries the receiving or rejecting of the gospel and the call to discipleship. Their comments suggest their concern to maintain a safe distance between “justification by works” and the biblical witness (Gray 1989:353).

Schweizer, Patte, Beare, Marguerat, Via, and Klein understand the passage quite differently. According to this view, the “least of these my brothers” are not only missionaries, but are those who are in need for whatever reason (Beare 1987:496). They differ on whether Matthew means the Christian poor or all the poor, but are unanimous that πάντα τὰ ἔθνη represents the widest body of humanity. This presents a very different criterion of judgment. It is not the reception of a missionary but the mercy shown the poor ones in the community that determines one’s eschatological reception.

Supporters marshal strong arguments from other texts in Matthew’s Gospel to justify their respective views. However, the former position proves less tenable on several points. The appeal to the *shaliach* understanding of the missionaries is inconsistent with the ignorance of both the sheep and the goats. Jesus is not enunciating a *shaliach* identification with his apostles in this parable, for the sheep and goats would both have been formerly aware that such missionaries were representing the κύριος of those messengers. The surprise is indispensable in the passage and is a mark of its parabolic essence. It comes in the Lord’s identification with those whom one would not expect: the poor or marginal members of the community. By contrast, the apostles left little doubt as to whom they represented.

A more critical point, however, is the assumed audience or congregation for whom Matthew has compiled and shaped this

Gospel into a living witness, guide, and challenge. The former viewpoint assumes that *disciple* equals *apostle*, but we know from Paul's congregations and other New Testament witnesses that there were disciples whose only mission field was their own community, for "not all are apostles" (1 Cor 12:29). Matthew's Gospel, while preserving much about the missionary work of the apostle and its apocalyptic significance, addresses itself primarily to a community struggling to understand Jesus and his ethical demands. Thus it is more likely that this climactic point of Jesus' teaching addresses the more pressing question for the community living between the resurrection and parousia; namely, "How are we to be found ready on that day for which we are commanded to watch and pray?"

We will challenge both interpretations against the exegesis of the pericope itself, and reconsider the message this apocalyptic parable conveyed to the Matthean community. The study will be complete only when we relate these results to the concerns of biblical theology.

PARABLE OR PREDICTION—THE LITERARY CONTEXT OF MATT 25:31–46

There is disagreement among scholars concerning whether or not this pericope is a parable. Theoretically this affects the reading of the pericope, even though some authors ignore the exegetical implications of this decision.

The pericope appears as the climactic lesson in the final discourse of Jesus, contained in chapters 24 and 25. (Some would include chapter 23.) Matthew 24:1–44 contains prophetic material—the "apocalyptic discourse"—with only a few metaphorical images punctuating important points (24:28, 32, 43). These metaphors and short parable-like expressions emphasize the paranetic aspect of the discourse, rather than the prophetic. They contribute to the message: "Watch!" From here Matthew moves completely from prophetic and apocalyptic material to parables which combine apocalyptic themes (the return of the master and subsequent judgment in 24:45–51, the coming of the bridegroom in 25:1–13, the departure and return of the master and the

accounting which follows in 25:14–30) and exhortation. Finally, the paranesis associated with this apocalyptic expectation is repeated: “Watch! Be ready!”

Each of the parables adds something to this exhortation. At the end of 25:30, however, the exhortation remains incomplete. The community has been told to watch, to be ready, to prepare in advance for delay (Patte 1987:343), and to use the master’s resources diligently for his profit. But this work of preparation and interim business still needs to be defined. Matt 25:31–46 completes the discourse in both respects.

The passage presents an exchange which occurs not in some parabolic setting, but at the Great Judgment itself. The events of 25:31, 32a, and 46, which serve as a frame for the pericope, belong to the realm of apocalyptic expectation divested of its metaphors of a returning οἰκοδεσπότης or of a net of fish which need to be sorted out. These verses echo 24:30–31, but do not reproduce those events exactly. Here the pericope moves us into parable. Every time Jesus explains the apocalyptic separation (the gathering of the elect and the disposal of the wicked), the moment of separation coincides with entering one’s eschatological destiny, as in 3:12; 13:41–43; 13:49f; and 24:30f. However, here for the first time we see a dialogue between the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου and those on either side. We do not usually see such a pause between the act of separation and placement in the eternal reward or punishment in apocalyptic visions. But in the parables it often serves as a literary device intended to bring home the point of the story. The parable of the unforgiving servant, the laborers in the vineyard, and the talents all employ the moment of dialogue as one in which the point of the parable is expressly stated.

Oudersluys has noted that the only parabolic element appears in 25:32b, which introduces the figure of the shepherd separating the goats and sheep (1973:153). He considers this no more than a simile. However, there is no closing parenthesis on this simile. *Sheep* and *goats* become positive terms for the two groups the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου creates by virtue of the separation. The υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου “will stand the sheep at his right hand but the goats at

the left.” Parabolic language has begun to enter this pericope, suggesting that what follows is a parable, but with a vivid sense of the apocalyptic significance of this exchange.

Parabolic language continues to intrude in the shift from υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου to ὁ βασιλεὺς in 25:34. Schweizer has argued that the word *king* here does not refer to the Jewish conception of God as the king who identifies with the poor (1975:496). However, the “king” figure plays an important part in parables, as in the Unforgiving Servant and the Wedding Feast. *King* functions as a substitute for both υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου at the eschatological judgment and the figure of the Judge in these parables, whose words and actions warn the hearers about what is required of those who would see the kingdom of God.

To classify this pericope, then, one might invent a special subcategory, such as a “future more vivid” parable. The story appears without the usual parabolic incipits, but parabolic elements are woven into the story to move the hearers’ focus away from the futureness of the events to the present ethical realities of the kingdom. The revelation about the kingdom is given ultimate significance in our pericope because of the vividness of the presentation of and expectation of the Last Judgment in which it is set. This “apocalyptic parable” (Donahue 1988:110) reveals that the keys to the kingdom are mercy and compassion, which are concretized in deeds to the needy of the community. As such, the story teaches the community not only *to* watch and be ready for that Day, but how to act in the present so as to be found ready on that Day.

Comparison with Matt 7:21–23 helps us understand this classification. These verses again describe “that Day,” which most naturally means the Day of Judgment, the return of the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου as Judge and king. The observation that the passage lacks any parabolic incipit or simile, save for the device of dialogue, does not deter one from understanding that it functions as an exhortation to devote oneself to doing the will of God. This exhortation is more vivid and significant because of the apocalyptic context which supports it. Appealing to the “point of view” of

the Last Day enforces the warning against insufficient discipleship and clarifies what true discipleship involves. Matthew thus stands in the tradition of apocalyptic literature, which in its highest form integrates future hope and present exhortation.

Apart from the Gospels, we find many examples of a writer appealing to the apocalyptic judgment to give weight to an ethical exhortation (such as Paul in Rom 14:10–13). Our passage belongs with the type of apocalyptic literature that is concerned with the eschatological character of ethics. It seeks to prepare the community to face the Day posited in those claims.

EXPOSITION OF THE PARABLE

THE ΥΙΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΥ AND THE SEPARATION

Matt 25:31–32 places the hearer at the final scene of history. The coming of the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου with all the angels refers to this moment throughout the Gospel (13:41; 16:27; 24:27; 24:30; and 26:64). The future role of the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου is one of judgment, when all will be repaid “according to their deeds” (16:27). The υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου sits on the throne of his glory (or his glorious throne, if one takes θρόνου δόξης αὐτοῦ as a hendiadys), which emphasizes the participation of the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου in the δόξα of God as well as in the authority to judge πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. This is the moment anticipated in 28:18, when God gives the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου “all authority on heaven and earth.” (The verse uses the “divine passive.”)

All the nations or Gentiles (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) are gathered before him by πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι, “all the angels,” who in former announcements of this Last Day either do the separating itself or simply gather the elect (24:31). Here, however, the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου will perform the separation “as a shepherd sets apart the sheep from the goats.” This is most appropriate for what follows in the parable: the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, not the angels, recognizes who showed mercy and who did not.

The identification of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη stands as a milestone in the interpretation of this pericope. Does this phrase refer only to Gen-

tiles as opposed to the Jews (who are often referred to as ὁ λαός in Matthew), or to non-Christian Gentiles as opposed to Christians, or simply to “all the nations”? While τὰ ἔθνη does in fact refer to Gentiles throughout most of the LXX and New Testament, πάντα τὰ ἔθνη does not unambiguously refer to all the Gentile nations over against the Jewish nation. In Matthew specifically, one who would wish to see a clear break between the witness to the Jews and the witness to the Gentiles would read the Great Commission as, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the Gentiles,” and would also have to understand the references to πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in 24:9 and 24:14 in this way.

The apocalyptic thrust minimizes the distinction between nations and includes the Jewish nation as one among the nations (Beare 1987:493). In some of the Psalms, one gets the sense that the call for “all the nations” to clap their hands and praise YHWH is an all-inclusive call, not a call from the Jewish nation to the Gentile nations, but a call to the Jewish nation in unison with the Gentile nations. Similarly, in apocalyptic discourse, when nation rises against nation and kingdom against kingdom, Israel is seen as one of these nations. When the disciples are hated by πάντα τὰ ἔθνη and when they preach the gospel to πάντα τὰ ἔθνη (24:9, 14), both the Jewish nation as well as Gentile nations are in view.

In the Great Commission itself, we must either understand πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in the broadest sense (i.e., now the gospel is no longer to be preached only among the Jews but among the Gentile nations as well as the Jewish nation) or consider that Matthew wants to enforce an ethnic distinction against the known history of the early church which continued its witness to the Jewish people while expanding to Gentile mission. Finally, in the logic of the parable itself, to insist upon a distinction at this point (Gentile vs. Jew) is to miss the parable’s challenge to differentiate between those who show mercy and those who do not. In Matthew’s Gospel, this eschatological separation does not take into account ethnic distinctions, but rather distinctions which have meaning in the kingdom.

Some claim that non-Christian Gentiles (or simply non-Christians) are in view here and that we thus have a “sectarian attitude” (Donahue 1988:11) reflected, in which the non-Christian nations which persecute the Christians will be judged by how they treated the Christians (or perhaps just the missionaries). However, Matthew may not be able to make such a distinction. He thinks the gospel will have gone out to all nations by the time of this judgment (24:14; 28:18–20; see Patte 1987:348). The judgment of all the nations becomes a judgment of those who knew what the gospel’s claims on them and for their lives were. The very distinction between Christian and non-Christian, like the distinction between Gentile and Jew, loses its meaning here, for it is precisely the point of the parable to define what constitutes true discipleship, or at least to hold out one inescapable aspect of it.

It is here that one of Matthew’s themes—namely that of the “mixed body of the church,” as Augustine would put it in *De Doctrina Christiana*—comes again to expression. In 7:21–23; 13:24–30, 36–43, 47–50; and 22:10–14, Matthew has brought together sayings and parables which speak to a mixed community consisting both of true disciples and those who bear the name but not the fruits of a disciple. Matthew’s concern is to impress upon his community what the fruits of a true disciple are and what attitudes should define the life of the disciple. There is thus for him no real separation of Christian from non-Christian until the Great Separation which the angels or the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου will perform. In Matthew, the church is to be judged and sorted into the two groups of bad fish and good fish, wheat and tares, sheep and goats, along with the nations. One thus cannot make much of the “least of these my siblings” as standing for the Christian community over against outsiders.

The eschatological separation comes quickly in v. 32. All the peoples of the earth are gathered and the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου separates them “as a shepherd sets apart the sheep from the goats.” Exegetes have puzzled here over the shift from the neuter plural of ἔθνη to the masculine plural accusative αὐτούς. Gray criticizes

the attempt to make too much of this, insisting on the license of the storyteller (1989:356). Donahue sees in this shift an indication of composition history (1988:133–134). Both miss the point that the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου sorts out or separates the nations into the two groups, sheep and goats, not as ethnic groups but as individuals who have or have not had mercy on the “least ones.” He will thus not separate nation from nation, but individual from individual, thus αὐτούς rather than αὐτά. Ethnic distinctions, or even claims to religious distinction, will not carry weight on that Day. The remainder of the parable reveals what will carry weight.

The image of the shepherd who separates the flock recalls Ezek 34:17, 20–24. There the fat sheep are judged because of the lean sheep, again related to inequality of social conditions. Here, however, we find sheep and goats. The parable presents a thoroughly new opposition here, departing from the expectations of the hearers. It is not the separation of the “righteous” from the “wicked,” nor the “just” from the “sinners,” nor even the “fat sheep” from the “lean sheep.” The parable selects a new dipole, that of sheep and goats, in order to sidestep the preconceived understandings of the basis on which the eschatological separation or judgment will take place. In its place it constructs a new definition of the qualitative difference between those who are welcomed into the kingdom and those who are sent to the eternal fire.

The particular choice of sheep and goats reflects the concern of Matthew regarding the mixed body of the ἐκκλησία. Lev 1:10 mentions a larger group, “the sheep,” from which may come either a lamb or a goat. It is unlikely that Matthew has this text from Leviticus in mind, but Oudersluys cites Jeremias’ story of herding sheep in Palestine which confirms a long-standing tradition. A shepherd’s flock might ordinarily consist of both sheep and goats. At night, the shepherd would have to separate the sheep from the goats as the goats preferred warmth while the sheep slept out in the open field. This task was easily and unmistakably accomplished, since the Syrian sheep were white and the goats black (Oudersluys 1973:153). With the same precision, the υἱὸς τοῦ

ἀνθρώπου will separate the sheep from the goats on that Day, making of the one flock two groups. The *sheep* he stands at his right hand, and the *goats* at his left.

A study of δεξιός and εὐώνυμος in Matthew reveals that being at the right hand has an absolute value attached to it. It denotes a participation in the authority, power, splendor, and blessedness of the one at whose right hand one is. This is especially clear from 26:64. The word εὐώνυμος does not always carry negative overtones, but often a complementary positive value to being at the right hand. Thus when the mother of John and James asks for one to sit at the right hand and one at the left in the kingdom, she asks an equal share for both. Court notes this as the “completeness” of left and right.

When right and left are here *opposed*, however, one senses that only the right side retains its absolute value. The left takes its value in relation to the right hand. Here the sheep are invited to participate in the glory and blessing of the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, or the king, but the goats are excluded by virtue of being set on the left. The τὰ μὲν . . . τὰ δέ indicates the contrasting positions. A simple καί would not prepare the hearer for the dread opposition of the fates of the two groups.

THE COMMENDATION OF THE SHEEP

The “king” speaks to those at his right hand, whose blessedness is hinted at already by their position. The ensuing dialogue is the means for disclosing an important revelation about the nature of, the life of, or the requirements of the kingdom. Matt 25:34–45 resembles most closely the parable of the Unforgiving Servant, which only had the negative example rather than a balanced set of examples, positive and negative. The earlier parable disclosed that the forgiveness which maintains one’s place in the kingdom requires that the kingdom’s norm be reproduced in the children of the kingdom during this life if they will remain such. In a similar way, this parable reveals the nature of the “king” which must be reproduced in those who truly belong to the kingdom—compassion and servanthood.

The first word, δεῦτε, is a word of unquestionable invitation, one which will be familiar to the hearer as the word with which Jesus called people to discipleship throughout the Gospel (cf. 4:19). Now the word welcomes the true disciples, who are “my Father’s blessed ones.” It summons them, “Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the founding of the world.” The sense of belonging to “the Father” has been an important means of expressing the disciples’ relationship to God, especially in the Sermon on the Mount. In this context the hearer might need to ask why they are called to *inherit* (in the imperative) rather than *enter* the kingdom. Matthew employs (or the Jesus sayings preserve) verbs of entering in this context throughout the Gospel, as in 5:20; 19:23f; and 21:31.

The command to inherit, together with the commendation of these sheep as the “Father’s blessed ones,” leads the hearer to reflect on these sheep as children of God. Only the children *inherit* a kingdom rather than enter it. Language of υἱοθεσία or adoption is prominent in Paul, who has in mind an adoption of the believers as the brothers and sisters of Christ. John goes further, using language of *becoming* children of God in John 1:12–13. Matthew conceives of this quite differently. “Being called children” or “becoming children of God” appears in Matt 5:9; 13:38; and, more helpfully, in 5:44–48. It is in imitation that one becomes a child of God. One must therefore become as a little child, to learn a new set of behaviors from the Parent she or he observes, as well as from an elder Brother. This is far from legalism, for Matthew does not lay down a plan of salvation based on works of the Law, but on transformation of the heart which bears fruit in deeds. This one is a child of God. The one who has internalized the motivation of God and of Jesus to act *inherits* the kingdom; she does not merely enter it. Throughout the Gospel we find that this involves mercy, compassion, watchful care, and providing for the “little ones.”

Matthew 25:35f catalogs six categories of need in which the king claims to have been found and six corresponding works of mercy which these sheep have performed for him in his need. The surprise of the passage is not in the works themselves, but in the

claim of the king to have been the recipient of these at the hands of the sheep. The works themselves are reminiscent of works attributed to God or to Jesus throughout the Gospel. God feeds the birds of the air and the grass of the field (6:25–33) and will do so all the more for people, so they can be assured and trust God. Jesus feeds the hungry crowds of those who have come out to hear him on two separate occasions, and promises blessing to the one who gives drink to “one of these little ones” in 10:42. In Matthew’s Gospel it is Jesus who invites the heavy-laden and the weary. Jesus gathers them in to give them rest. And it is Jesus who, in all the Synoptics, does not keep himself aloof from the sick, but visits them with his presence and with healing.

The characteristic behind all these works is mercy or compassion toward the one exhibiting need. The parable excludes all attempts to see these as works which one imitates for one’s own benefit, as if to calculate a guaranteed reception into the kingdom. The aim of these works is to relieve need. Behind these works, however, is a call for the hearers to imitate freely and uncalculatingly the mercy and compassion of Jesus. Matthew’s Gospel abounds in references which serve to characterize Jesus’ compassion. Emphasis on Jesus’ compassion is perhaps second only to emphasis on his authority. Not only does he feel compassion and express it throughout the Gospel (9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 18:27; 20:30), women and men also appeal to him for his mercy (9:27; 15:22; 17:15; 20:30f). He does not turn them away without giving them what they need. Jesus’ compassion and mercy holds him close to those who need the mercy and compassion of those around them *after* his earthly ministry just as it did during his earthly ministry.

The sheep are for the first time called οἱ δίκαιοι, “the just,” or “the righteous.” It is safe now to refer to them by this more familiar apocalyptic category since Matthew has given δικαιοσύνη its particular content in 25:35f. It is this same “justness” which made Joseph act more compassionately toward Mary in his plan to divorce her secretly rather than exact sacrifice from her, as early as 1:19 (Patte 1987:350).

The “righteous” are perplexed. Κύριε, πότε, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you?” Here the emphasis is on the σε. The just ones know they have done these things to others, but cannot imagine how they had done it for the king.

THE “LEAST”

The king declares, “Insofar as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.” Here two questions face the exegete. First, who qualifies as “one of the least of these my brothers and sisters”? Second, how does one touch the king by reaching out to the “least”?

A variety of solutions has been proposed on the first question. *The least* may signify the missionaries of the church, the poor of the church, or all the world’s needy.

The term ἀδελφός, “brother,” often indicates in the New Testament not a blood relation but a fellow believer or disciple. In Matthew 12:48–50 Jesus specifically circumscribes a realm of siblinghood around those who do the Father’s will. This is no doubt in view in the hundredfold of 19:29, as well in 18:15–22 and 18:35 about forgiving one’s brother or sister. It is an “in-house” term in the early church, and the hearers of this parable likely thought of this as its primary meaning. Ἐλάχιστος is the superlative degree of what appears elsewhere in the Gospel as μικρός, “little ones.” The term refers to disciples in 10:42, but in 18:5f, 10, and 14, the term applies to the vulnerable or weak among the community, not missionary figures. The ethic taught in 18:1–14 toward the μικροί is in large respect the attitude required in 25:31–46 with regard to the ἐλάχιστοι. It is an attitude of watchfulness for the good of the vulnerable members of the community, whether it be for their spiritual continuance (Matt 18) or their physical well-being (Matt 25).

Two considerations enter upon our further identification of the “least of the brothers and sisters.” First, do they truly represent a group distinct from πάντα τὰ ἔθνη or do they function as a distinct group only for the parable? Second, while in a community the

term ἀδελφός would most likely refer to a member of that community, is its meaning limited to the needy of the community to the exclusion of the needy who do not profess to be part of the community?

How are we to understand the “least” in relationship with “all the nations”? The parabolic nature and aim of this pericope suggest that we think of these “least” not as a separate group (such as Christian missionaries), but as a κανών or standard by which the separation of sheep and goats takes place. When one insists too strongly on identifying the characters in parables as historical figures or groups, one runs into the danger of allegorizing (cf. Augustine on the Parable of the Good Samaritan) and thus missing the dynamic thrust of the parable. The “least of these my siblings” are not a third group over against the sheep and the goats, as if the “least” were huddled around the feet of the king. Rather, they are the κανών by which the nations are measured and found to be sheep or goats, to be consistent disciples in deed and word or not disciples at all.

Has a person exhibited mercy and compassion to the “least of the siblings” in the midst of his or her community? *Needy* is not so much an ontological classification as a situational description. Thus there is no need to identify “the needy” as a third group. The needy, too, are capable of mercy and compassion.

Who are the “brothers and sisters”? Did the hearers carry out the ethic in an exclusive manner? The parable does not emphasize the limitations of the object of mercy. Rather, it emphasizes the need to actualize mercy and compassion. Marguerat sees in this term not a sectarian comrade but a raising of all the neglected to a new status as “siblings of the king” (1981:511). Marguerat has perhaps read too much into the text of the parable. More to the point is whether mercy or compassion is limited. That is, does Matthew mean to distinguish between an ἀδελφός and one who is merely a neighbor? There was no such distinction in Jesus’ own compassion. His mercy made one a brother or sister. The exhortation in the Sermon on the Mount in 5:44–48 to imitate the generosity of the Father in heaven is a call to give of oneself

irrespective of the quality of the receiver, whether just or unjust, good or bad, fellow Christian or world's needy.

The vision of judgment calls one to hold compassion and mercy as qualities to imitate and enact. As the Gospel itself addresses a community of Christians, the parable formulates this in terms of that community. The hearers want to identify with the sheep, not with the goats, and the parable points them to the least of those, the most vulnerable among them. The excitement to compassion or mercy starts there, but by its very nature, and indeed by the nature of the God and Lord whom the community is to follow and emulate, mercy will not cease within the walls of the ἐκκλησία but will spill over into the secular community. This is the salt, or the light of good works which shines before people and leads them to glorify God, who works through mercy.

How it is possible to touch the king by touching a needy brother or sister Matthew presents as a mystery to his community. There is a rabbinic parallel, cited in Schweizer, where YHWH says "My children, when you have given food to the poor, I account it as though you had given it to me" (Schweizer 1975:476). Such an explanation of "accounting" good works is excluded from our parable, for there is no "as if" or "as though." Doing it to the ἐλάχιστοι and doing it to the king are closely identified. There is no common-sense explanation for this aspect of the parable. By placing this lesson in the climactic position in an end-time discourse, Matthew has laid the foundations for a powerful ethic informed by the community's eschatological expectations.

WATCHING FOR THE DAY AND CARING FOR THE NEEDY

The community has understood its stance as watching for the coming of the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, as waiting for and praying for the arrival of that Day. Much of the "apocalyptic discourse" common to Matthew, Mark, and Luke focuses on the exhortation to watch and be ready for that day. Matthew alone shapes that vague exhortation—"Watch!"—into discernible form. Here one suspects the influence of the prophet Amos, whose understanding of the coming of that Day seems to inform Matthew's use of the term.

Amos speaks to those who watch for the Day of YHWH.

Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD!

Why do you want the day of the LORD?

It is darkness, and not light;

It is as though one ran from a lion and fell upon a bear!

(Amos 5:18)

For Amos, the neglect of the poor and needy of the house of Israel has made the people unready to meet YHWH. It has brought YHWH's judgment down upon them (Amos 2:6–7a; 4:1; 5:10–12, 15; 8:4–6). Matthew speaks as well to those who watch and desire that Day when the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου will come. He uses Jesus' words to draw a picture of the sort of life that will be ready for the Day when it arrives. A climactic part of this picture is the imitation of the mercy and compassion of the Father in the context of ministering to those in need. Here is the mystery: While we wait for the parousia of the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, he is present to us now among the needy. Patte describes this as an completely different sort of παρουσία from the one which the community was expecting, hence the surprise of both the sheep and the goats (Patte 1987:350).

The presence of the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου in the “least of these brothers and sisters” follows a long preparation in Matthew's Gospel for understanding the present-ness of judgment. What one does or has done affects one's standing at the eschatological separation. John the Baptist preaches that “already the axe is laid to the roots of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matt 3:10). Matthew pictures Jesus saying these same words in 7:19. Likewise, 6:14f shows that forgiveness offered in the present affects one's being forgiven in the future. Also, in 7:2 Jesus says one's judging and “measuring” in the present will come back upon the person in the future. All these comments urge the hearer to consider the eschatological consequences of present actions. In 25:40 and 45, Matthew's community is watching for the coming of the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου in the future. Here Matthew points to the presence of

the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου *in the present* and to the judgment which inheres in the present, depending on whether one grasps or misses the opportunity.

As the response of the goats make clear, the “least of the siblings” were not always in focus for those who watched for the coming king. The ones who fail to understand the significance of those who stood as far apart in glory from the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου as east is from the west will find that Day to be “darkness and not light.” When mercy and compassion reach out to those in need, the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου is present, though unseen and unrecognized. Recognition, however, is not required. Indeed, this lack of recognition serves to highlight the importance of expressing mercy concretely, rather than counting up concrete expressions of mercy. This is simply expressed in the double occurrence of ἐποιήσατε, punctuating the king’s response, in a Gospel where doing (ποιεῖν) is the only true expression of believing, following, and belonging.

The picture of a people unprepared for that Day, as in Amos’ preaching, comes in the dialogue between the king and the goats. As warmly as he welcomed the sheep, so sternly does he charge the goats to “go” from him into the “eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” This πῦρ has been a recurring image in Matthew from 3:12, in the preaching of John the Baptist, onwards. Some appeal to the root meaning of κόλασις (25:46) to suggest that the parable envisions a purgatory-type experience, but this is to use a lexical nuance contrary to the direction of the whole passage and the significance of the separation in Matthew. The fire is an eschatological destiny, not a halfway house, and the exclusion is bitter because it is permanent. The nature of this exclusion is not so much in view as the cause of it.

THE GOATS—IMITATING THE NORMS OF THIS WORLD

In perfect parallel antithesis to the commendation of “the righteous,” the king explains what lies behind this exclusion. The very acts of mercy that had been done by the righteous were left undone by the goats, who are now “cursed ones.” Here, too, there

is a striking difference between the Matthean judgment parable and so many judgment scenes in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. It is not a separation of those who abstain from wickedness and those who participate in wickedness, but of those who participate in showing mercy and those who abstain from expressing mercy. “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” (Matt 5:4).

Those at his left respond as did the “righteous ones.” Κύριε, πότε . . . “Lord, when did we see . . . ?” Some commentators regard κύριε in a generic sense (cf. 27:63), as befitting the juridical dignity of the king. There is a strong semantic basis for so doing. It is difficult, however, to keep 7:21–23 from intruding upon the interpretation of the parable. This Gospel was read and heard in a community who called the “king” κύριε—“Lord”—out of a non-generic, faith-specific understanding. Thus the hearers might not hear in the protestation of the goats, “Κύριε, . . .” the address of polite infidels, but the danger of their own misunderstanding of what it means to be a disciple.

When they protest, “When did we see you hungry?” one senses they are clear in their conscience that they never saw the king in such a state and that if they had, they would certainly have served him. The vocabulary itself provides a clue to their tragic mistake. They do not protest, as do the sheep, “When did we see you hungry and not give you to eat, when did we see you thirsty and not give you to drink.” Rather, they simply replace all the verbs which represent the acts of mercy with the one verb, διακονεῖν (“serve”). Although it is possible that the storyteller does this to conserve words, the observation that the parallelism is disturbed only here gives the exegete cause to probe further.

The conspicuous absence of the verbs of showing mercy reflects the life story of the goats. The choice of the word διακονεῖν shows that the goats comprehend one concept, that of serving. The implicit protest is that they would have served the king had they encountered him (knowingly) in a state of need. This protest shows that the goats knew to serve their superiors. In this they reflect the norm of the kingdom of the world, which is under the

power of Satan (4:8f). In this kingdom, the “rulers of the nations lord it over them.” The norm of the kingdom of God, which Jesus manifested in his earthly ministry, was “not to be served, but to serve,” οὐκ . . . διακονηθῆναι ἀλλὰ διακονῆσαι (20:28). Serving the one who has no claim to be served is an act of compassion, imitating the generosity of the “Father in heaven.” The one who manifests this belongs to the kingdom.

The “goats,” while they would most certainly serve ὁ κύριος, have not served “the least of these.” This latter service shows oneself to have been touched by Jesus’ mercy. Here again the parable of the Unforgiving Servant provides the closest parallel. There the claim of the parable is upon all who have experienced God’s forgiveness. They are to live by the newly established norm of the kingdom, the norm of forgiveness. They are *not* to claim their due, which is the norm of the world. The Unforgiving Servant is ultimately damned because he failed to step out of the economy of the world and to participate in the mercy of the king who forgave him such a large debt. He did not go out to forgive others their debts. When one ceases to live by the norm of the kingdom, one steps outside of the benefits one has experienced at the hands of God and the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. One shows oneself truly to belong to the economy of the world. Here the goats fail to return to ὁ κύριος what they had received because they have not reflected mercy in their lives. The community clearly would have understood this, since they had received mercy and had heard the norm enunciated by Jesus, “not to be served but to serve.”

The surprise to the goats is that in failing to serve the “least” ones among them, they missed the true opportunity to serve the Lord. The surprise to the sheep is that in the mercy and compassion which had become part of their nature toward the insignificant ones, they were actually giving to the king. Dan Via notes that they protest having done anything worthy of a reward, while the goats are surprised to find themselves excluded from reward (1987:96, 98). Again, in emphasizing the lack of calculation and ignorance of the norms of the kingdom by presenting both the just and the cursed as ignorant, the parable pushes the hearers to

seek after and make their own the eyes and heart of compassion, which Matthew holds up as the true norm.

How are we to be ready on the Day for which we watch and pray? The capstone in Matthew's answer (though not by any means the only stone; cf. 18:23–35 and others) is that one must reflect the mercy, compassion, and attitude of servanthood which were present in Jesus towards those whose only merit for such attention is the need. The children of the kingdom will inherit the kingdom prepared for them. One becomes like one of these little children by becoming like God, whom Jesus has revealed. This involves taking responsibility for the "least ones," providing for them out of the compassion which one learns in one's heart precisely because one belongs to the kingdom.

THE CHALLENGE OF MATTHEW 25:31–46

We now return to our opening examination of the two lines of interpretation common in Matthean scholarship today. We conclude that the second, which understands the parable to function as an exhortation to care for the needy members of the community, is closer to Matthew's meaning than the first, which sees in this parable an admonition regarding the special status of Christian missionaries. Nevertheless it still falls short with respect to its place in the whole of Matthew's thought.

The ethic of Matt 25:31–46 relates closely to the norms established in 18:23–35. Matthew presents the life of one prepared for the *παρουσία* as a life which has embodied the norms of the gospel, namely the character of Jesus, and so has broken free of the norms of the world. It is this tree which bears the good fruit. The norms of the world reflect the rules of exchange, but the norm of Jesus is giving freely. Whether the need is for forgiveness or physical care, the giving is based on one's experience of receiving the same from the "Father who is in heaven." For this reason, the "least of these my brothers and sisters" are not just the needy members of the community. The norms of the kingdom have no such distinctions.

The ethical demand is real, but not divorced from the word of “good news.” Like the parable of the Unmerciful Servant, this parable calls for a genuineness in living—a genuineness defined by the norms of the gospel in one’s life and relationships. And it submits a resounding condemnation for those who claim insider status while living by the economy of the world. This “good news” is the nature of God proclaimed by Jesus, who gives according to need and mercy. The response is to share the experience of this provision of God with others both within the community and outside it as the community makes the kingdom present even as we wait for the παρουσία of the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BIBLICAL THEOLOGY: WORKS VS. FAITH DEBATE

Some biblical theologians will be unhappy with the interpretation of the parable given here. Matthew, already suspiciously legalistic, in our passage appears to advocate a “justification by works” theology. Such theological interests have often obscured the voice of the parable. This is clearly the problem with Sherman Gray who, in his dissertation, insists that these works of mercy are symbolic.

The six corporal works are the parabolic stage props used to convey the primary meaning of the parable: It is not necessary to have personally encountered the pre-resurrection Jesus or the post-resurrection Jesus to come to believe in him; he is encountered in “the least,” his representatives. (1989:353)

This would mean that Matt 25:31–46, rather than having as its concern the performance of charitable works, would be more concerned with the acceptance of Christian faith. (1989:359)

Lambrecht concludes his analysis of the parousia discourse in a similar fashion. He identifies the acceptance or rejection of Christ—and thus the gospel—with accepting or rejecting his missionaries (1972:340).

Klein suggests why authors wish to move away from taking the parable at face value. He cites R. Niebanck's argument against the traditional interpretation of this parable which "makes of the neighbor an instrument for the service of God and leads to blatant works righteousness" (Klein 1982:139). Klein himself understands it to be an embarrassment to have a testimony to "justification by works in such a key New Testament passage" (1982:139). Such comments reflect the failure of some sectors of theology in dealing with the New Testament witnesses. First, they will not hear them on their own terms because it offends their conception of a true biblical theology. Second, they assume that such passages in Scripture are trying to answer the same question they themselves are asking.

When Paul stresses that a believer is "justified by faith" (Rom 5:1), or throws out the possibility of justification by works of the law (Galatians), it is because there are contingent circumstances guiding his argument, such as other preachers who come in the name of Christ arguing the opposite. When he is not so occupied, he speaks of the life of the believer as one which abounds in acts of loving one's neighbor and serving one's neighbor (Rom 13:8–10; 1 Cor 13:1–13; Gal 6:2)—in effect, fulfilling the Law (cf. Rom 13:10). Sanders has made the helpful distinction that Paul speaks of "justification by faith" when addressing how one enters the new covenant people of God, but he talks about righteous works in the context of *continuing* among the people of God (1983:10).

If such theologians were to take seriously the presupposition we have taken for granted—namely that Matthew has written his Gospel to a community of believers which is asking different questions from those asked in the communities Paul addresses—then perhaps they could hear the Gospel without fear of cacophony. The Epistle of James, a work of kindred spirit to Matthew's Gospel, has likewise not been allowed to play a significant role in Reformed theology because of the phrase "therefore a person is justified by works, and not by faith alone." Here one must ask whether Paul and "James" had the same body of "works" in view when one wrote against the role of works in justification and the

other wrote for the role of works in justification. Paul, referring to the “works of the Law,” had in mind those rituals and observances (such as circumcision and observation of kosher laws) by which one entered the historical people of Israel. James had in mind a different sort of works, the very works we find in Matthew 25, those works of reaching out to a brother or sister with food or clothing in their need.

Although it is dangerous to use one author’s words to interpret another’s, it is useful to juxtapose James 2:13–18 with Matt 25:31–46. For James, the knowledge of future judgment carries ethical implications for life on this side of the judgment. Awareness of the coming judgment is not to bring a preoccupation with *avoiding negative behavior*. Rather, it spurs one to acts of mercy, the positive enactment of the will of God. The way to prepare for the judgment is to act mercifully (James 2:13). This mercy is further defined through an examination of faith. The text appears to oppose faith and works, but in fact it opposes the sort of faith which results in works to the fraudulent faith which bears no fruit. Acts of mercy or compassion toward a needy brother or sister are the concretization of faith, the necessary fruits of true faith. This is again close to Matthew. Not everyone who calls Jesus “κύριε, κύριε” will enter the kingdom, but only the one in whose life the will of the “Father in heaven” has become manifest.

The question in Matthew, or in Matthew’s community, is not “On what basis do we stand in the covenant people of God?” It is, rather, “What does it mean to live in faith?” More specifically, Matthew addresses the parables in 24:45 through 25:46 to the question, “How are we to prepare for the Day when the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου appears?” He sharpens the issues with each parable until a clear picture comes into focus: Act mercifully. In addressing the community of faith, Matthew answers different questions—questions about what it means to experience God’s forgiveness or compassion. One enters the kingdom, no doubt, by faith, but faith must bear the particular fruit of the kingdom if the tree is to remain planted by the River of Life. It is not a matter of a demand for a tally of good works, but a call for consistency. Jesus

challenges Matthew's community to live out in concrete expressions the life of the kingdom. In so doing, the community reflects its faith and its own experience of God's provision, forgiveness, and compassion as shown definitively in Jesus.

Theology must not apply these answers to other questions on its own agenda, even the agenda of some other New Testament writer. It must hear the answer and inquire after the question and the source of the question. The question of how to prepare for the Last Day seems remote to contemporary theology. The church seems unsure about whether or how to demythologize the eschatological hope.

Matthew may not be accused of "works righteousness" *per se*. Neither 25:31–46 nor 18:23–35 suggests that these acts of mercy *alone* qualify one to inherit the kingdom. Rather one inherits the kingdom or remains in forgiveness because one has allowed that experience to transform one's values and relationships. The result is that one does these things from the very compassion and mercy of Jesus. Here is a tension for the reader, who now knows what to do, but also must be aware of one's goals in doing it. The parable excludes a *calculated* pursuit of deeds of mercy.

In Matthew's Gospel, one often finds apocalyptic expressions, such as "fleeing from the wrath to come" or "meeting the coming of the kingdom unprepared" (3:7, *et al.*). Preparation consists not only in words or works but in a total reorientation, signified by serving as the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου served. This serving includes showing compassion as Jesus showed and being generous to all, regardless of their merit, simply because it is the nature of one's "Parent in heaven." Those who have embodied the kingdom's values and motivations, who have left behind the world's calculating spirit and sense of deserving, are the ones who will be welcomed into the kingdom. "En interrogeant l'homme sur ses oeuvres, le Juge s'enquiert de la relation qu'il a etablie avec Jesus" (Marguerat 1981:519).

The poetry of the parable itself is gripping. Rare the reader who can avoid its existential tug. The fear of judgment may not well up in our stomachs as we hear, but the question is whether the church

can transform its pietistic longings to touch the Lord who touches us into acts of mercy toward those in any sort of need. Surely the church knows better than to object that acts of mercy violate some theological canon of justification by faith alone! If not, then that doctrine has truly become dangerous. Matthew's voice, echoed by James, speaks loudly in the voice of the υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου: "Insofar as you have done it to the least of these my sisters and brothers, you have done it to me!"

REFERENCES

Allen, Willoughby C.

1922 *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, 3d ed. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.

Beare, Francis Wright

1987 *The Gospel According to Matthew*. Peabody: Hendrickson.

Crossan, John Dominic

1985 *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Charlesworth, James H.

1983 *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Vol. 1. New York: Doubleday.

Court, John M.

1985 "Right and Left: The Implications for Matthew 25:31–46." In *New Testament Studies* 31:223–33.

Donahue, John R.

1986 "The 'Parable' of the Sheep and the Goats: A Challenge to Christian Ethics." In *Theological Studies* 47:3–31.

1988 *The Gospel in Parable*. Philadelphia: Fortress.

- Farmer, Ron
1987 "The kingdom of God in the Gospel of Matthew." In *The kingdom of God in 20th-Century Interpretation*, pp. 119–130. Ed. W. Willis. Peabody: Hendrickson.
- Fenton, John C.
1963 *Saint Matthew*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Grassi, Joseph A.
1981 "'I Was Hungry and You Gave Me to Eat.' The Divine Identification Ethic in Matthew." In *biblical Theology Bulletin* 11:81–84.
- Gray, Sherman W.
1989 *The Least of My Brothers: Matthew 25.31–46: A History of Interpretation*. Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, vol. 114. Atlanta: Scholars Press.
- Kingsbury, Jack Dean
1988 *Matthew as Story*, 2d ed. Philadelphia: Fortress.
- Klein, Leonard
1982 "Who are the 'Least of the Brethren'?" In *Dialogue* 21:139–142.
- Lambrecht, Jan
1972 "The Parousia Discourse: Composition and Content in Mt. XXIV-XXV." In *L'Évangile Selon Matthieu: Rédaction et Théologie*. Ed. M. Didier. Belgium: Duculot.
- Levine, A.-J.
1988 "The Social and Ethical Dimensions of Matthean Social History." In *Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity*, vol. 14. New York: Edwin Mellen.
- Linnemann, Eta
1966 *Parables of Jesus: Introduction and Exposition*. Trans. J. Sturdy. London: SPCK.
- Marguerat, Daniel
1981 *Le Jugement Dans L'Évangile De Matthieu*. Geneva: Labor et Fides.

Oudersluys, R. C.

1973

“The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31–46): Eschatology and Mission, Then and Now.” In *Reformed Review* 26:151–161.

Patte, Daniel

1987

The Gospel According to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew's Faith. Philadelphia: Fortress.

Sanders, Ed P.

1983

Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People. Philadelphia: Fortress.

Schweizer, Eduard

1975

The Good News According to Matthew. Trans. O. D. Green. Atlanta: John Knox.

Smith, T. C., David L. Bartlett, Charles E. Booth, and Paul L. Nagano

1976

“An Exegesis of Matthew 25:31–46.” In *Foundations* 19:207–222.

Via, Dan O.

1987

“Ethical Responsibility and Human Wholeness in Matthew 25:31–46.” In *Harvard Theological Review* 80:79–100.

Book Reviews

The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities. By Mark S. Smith. Harper and Row, Publishers, 1990, 197 pages.

The question of where God comes from has been troubling children and theologians for centuries. The answers, diverse as the questioners, are never fully satisfying. Ultimately, the answer to both children and theologians is that we really do not know. The Bible is not concerned with God's origins; it simply assumes the existence of God.

The Bible does offer tantalizing hints concerning the origins of some of Israel's earliest conceptions of God. These glimpses into the question of the origins of Israel's beliefs about God are opaque and ambiguous at best. Any attempt to get at this question and to offer a definitive reconstruction for the origins of Israel's God and religion must necessarily depend on sparse and conflicting biblical and extra-biblical evidence. Mark S. Smith's *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities* is, therefore, not only an ambitious title, but an equally ambitious project.

Smith's volume is an up-to-date synthesis of biblical and archaeological scholarship. With this synthesis he offers evidence of Israel's early tribal, premonarchic religion as it evolved toward monotheism in the exilic period. The book closely scrutinizes Israel's early concepts of God, while drawing the development of monotheism itself in the later period in more general, broader strokes.

Smith begins with the acknowledgement that biblical scholarship on Israel's earliest religious expression and practice has begun to move in several significant new directions since Albright's *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*. The study of the religion of Israel has begun to move away from earlier views of religious syncretism with their assumption of Israel's cultural and religious uniqueness. "Syncretism, the union of religious phenomenon from two historically separate systems or cultures, remains a standard way of characterizing Israelite interest in deities other than Yahweh, and deemphasizes the importance of Israelite worship of other deities and practices forbidden in the Bible" (xx-xxi). Smith and a growing number of others are changing their view on this, since extra-biblical texts from Mari, Ugarit, and the Trans-Jordan reveal broad areas of cultural and religious similarity between the religions of Israel and Canaan.

Smith rightly shows that Israel's cultural and religious heritage is in many ways continuous with the culture and religion of Canaan. Biblical and extra-biblical texts and archaeological findings demonstrate a close relationship between Yahweh of Israel and the pantheon of Canaan, especially the gods El and Baal and the goddess Asherah. The earliest religion of Israel was one in which Yahweh was legitimately worshiped alongside the ruling gods of war, storm, and nurturance. This shift in thinking about Israel's religion recognizes the opposing forces of religious convergence and differentiation at work in Israel, moving Yahweh toward a more unique, solitary position as Israel's God.

Convergence, "the coalescence of various deities and/or some of their features into the figure of Yahweh," began during the tribal period and continued during the early monarchy (xxiii). At this time Yahweh easily came to be identified with the regnant El. Yahweh also took on the warrior-like qualities of Baal and the nurturant qualities of Asherah. It was these latter qualities of Baal and Asherah which became troublesome to the prophets and Deuteronomistic theologians of a later period.

Yet Yahweh did not borrow wholesale from the traits and aspects of the gods of Canaan. Through a selective process of differen-

tiation over time, Yahweh took on the more “positive” aspects of El, Baal, and Asherah. At the same time, Israel refrained from attributing to Yahweh the more objectionable qualities, such as sex and the seasonal death mirrored in the forces of nature.

Smith’s interpretation is overly “baalistic.” He too easily dismisses the ongoing influence of El on the religion of Israel and leans too heavily on evidence of Baal’s influence on and threat to Yahwism. This baalism is evident in Smith’s conclusion that the bull iconography adopted by Jeroboam I at Beth-el and Dan, a reversion to more ancient Northern religious symbols, is traceable to a mixed Baal and El heritage and no longer clearly distinguishable. Smith concludes that “the Canaanite tradition of the bull iconography ultimately provides the background for this rendering of Yahweh” (51).

The evidence for antecedents in the El cult are stronger than Smith’s argument may initially indicate. Iconographically, Baal is the god on the move, depicted mid-stride, mace in hand on his way to fight the forces of chaos and sterility. It is El who is typically referred to in inscriptions as the bull, while pictured as sitting enthroned on the divine mountain.

Smith points to a shift in thinking by scholars regarding the monarchy in Israel and the role the monarchy played in these processes of convergence and differentiation. Biblical scholars have too easily followed the Deuteronomist in depicting the rulers of Israel as monotheizing and resistant to centralization. Smith interprets the actions of the monarchy differently. Although other deities and their cult objects may have legitimately stood alongside Yahweh, they were always in an inferior position, since their characteristics were ultimately assimilated. It is the monarchy that played both a “conservative and yet innovative” role in encouraging the supremacy and then sole legitimacy of the rule of Yahweh, Israel’s national patron god.

While acknowledging the influence of the Judean monarchy, especially on the religion of “Israel,” Smith too easily underestimates foreign political influence and economic pressure at all stages of Judah and Northern Israel’s history. This is especially

evident in his view that solar language for Yahweh was strictly an indigenous phenomenon. The attraction of foreign trade and the necessity of defensive alliances made their influences felt all the way from the royal apartments to the inner courts of the temple. As H. Spieckermann has demonstrated, the threat to Yahwism posed by Assyrian overlordship and religious imposition should not be discredited too easily. Except for Smith's occasional references to Assyria and Babylon, the ancient Near Eastern context is largely absent from this treatment of the influences contributing to the early history of Yahweh.

Smith also calls attention to a new interest in Asherah and her role in early Israelite religion. In the chapter, "Yahweh and Asherah," Smith examines the references to Asherah in the Bible and in extra-biblical inscriptions, and asks whether Asherah refers to Yahweh's goddess-consort. After rehearsing both sides of the debate, Smith says, "Rather than supporting a theory of a goddess as the consort of Yahweh . . . the symbol outlived the cult of the goddess who gave her name to it and continued to hold a place in the cult of Yahweh" (94). The function and meaning of this cultic object are less than clear. Smith does not always clarify the reasoning behind his decisions on such matters.

In *The Early History of God*, Smith intended to use "the recent additions of data and major changes in perspective . . . to illuminate broad trends underlying the development of various features of Israelite religion" (xxvii). The author has achieved this goal. The book is a solid synthesis of material, well-stocked with information and bibliographic detail. It is a good beginning point, a place from which to launch one's pursuit of related questions and issues in greater detail.

—KATHRYN L. DE WITT

God in the White House: How Religion Has Changed the Modern Presidency. By Richard G. Hutcheson, Jr. Macmillan Publishing Company, 1988, 273 pages.

Richard G. Hutcheson, Jr., a senior fellow at the Rockford Institute Center on Religion and Society in New York, discusses the ways in

which the religious commitments of America's most recent presidents have shaped their political campaigns, administrative agendas, domestic programs, and foreign policies. He maintains that religion has become especially prominent in the White House in recent times because of the electorate's growing call for unequivocal public morality in light of the cultural crises of the 1960s and '70s, most notably Vietnam and Watergate. "In the understanding of the American people, moral character is religiously formed" (p. 231).

To provide a historical context for understanding the conspicuous influence of religion on the modern American presidency, the author begins with a lengthy sketch of the institutional separation of church and state in America, the development of the nation's civil religion, and the emergence of the office of the president as the symbol for that national faith. Hutcheson traces the two distinct intellectual streams in American thought which coalesced into the nonestablishment of religion in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution adopted in 1791. The theological writings of the 17th-century Puritan Roger Williams (founder of Rhode Island)—and the political legislation of the 18th-century Enlightenment—informed national leaders like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison (respectively, the authors of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution).

Though the nation's founders called for the institutional separation of church and state, they recognized the need for the cultural integration of religion and society in order "to produce a workable consensus undergirding 'public virtue'" (p. 30). According to Hutcheson, it is America's "civil religion," a phrase first used by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Social Contract* (1762), which has made this integration possible. The civil religion or national faith of America is the result of a multifaith society. It serves as a social-ordering faith, rather than a salvific faith and it depends on the vitality of the various saving faiths for its unifying role.

Beginning with George Washington, America's presidents have functioned as the symbolic heads and spokespersons for this single, common, national faith. More than just avoiding the pitfall

of church-state mingling, the president has often served a more positive role as a major articulator of the public faith which has provided the moral and spiritual basis for America's unity.

However, as the focal point of America's civil religion, the president suffered terribly when the cultural upheavals of the 1960s and early '70s (embodied most vividly in the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal) threw the nation into a moral crisis. Hutcheson refers to Richard Nixon as an enigmatic turning point in this regard. Raised in an evangelical Quaker home, he frequently held Sunday worship services in the East Room, which were attended by three or four hundred invited guests. His closest formal church affiliation during his Presidency was with the Key Biscayne (Florida) Presbyterian church. Billy Graham was an intimate confidant. Watergate proved to be his downfall. Nevertheless, Hutcheson contends that many Americans, stimulated by the emergence of the Religious Right into American politics, held ever firmly to the belief that religion could provide the basis of a value system by which to order national life. It is to this renewed call by the nation for a religiously informed public morality that recent presidents have responded in varying measure.

Gerald Ford is portrayed as an individual who followed the historic and traditional pattern for American presidents with regard to religion. That is, he separated his private faith from his public life. Although Ford, a life-long Episcopalian, attended church regularly with his family and participated in Congressional prayer meetings, he endeavored to draw a sharp distinction between his religious beliefs and his public responsibilities. Nevertheless, Ford claimed that the decision to pardon Nixon was religiously motivated—in part because of the call to forgiveness within Christianity.

In contrast to Ford, Southern Baptist Jimmy Carter was given the code name "the Deacon" by the Secret Service. Carter forthrightly sought to integrate his personal religious commitments into the framework of his public policies. An avid reader of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich and a regular adult Sunday school teacher while president, Carter was arguably the most

theologically astute Chief Executive since Woodrow Wilson. Hutcheson shows the ways in which Carter's fundamentalist Christian faith significantly influenced his foreign policies regarding the Panama Canal Treaty, the Iranian Hostage Affair, and the Camp David Accords, as well as his extensive efforts toward world peace, justice, and human rights. In all this, Carter was a conundrum to religious conservatives on the right who identified with his faith convictions, but did not resonate with his liberal political agenda.

Ronald Reagan, however, advocated an almost diametrically opposite political direction for the nation, despite a conservative religious background similar to Carter's (Disciples of Christ). Reagan's personal religious life was as a kind of generic, self-taught Protestantism which surfaced late in life as his earlier political liberalism shifted toward the right. Though Reagan attended Bel Air Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles for many years before going to Washington, he visited churches less frequently than any recent president—ostensibly for security reasons. His generalized Judeo-Christian world view helped shape components of his political philosophy as chief executive. Reagan's pro-life stand and his attitude toward school prayer, tuition tax credits, anti-Communism, and traditional family values were all affected. But the author contends that any symmetry between the ideology of Reagan and that of the Religious Right is coincidental rather than a matter of direct influence.

Hutcheson characterizes George Bush, a mainstream Episcopalian, as a combination of the personal piety of Carter and the sensitivity to the Religious Right of Reagan.

The author has augmented the existing pertinent historical material with interviews of several key individuals, including White House aides and speech writers, presidential spiritual advisers, and two of the past chief executives (Ford and Carter). Without suggesting that religion totally explains the behavior of recent presidents, Hutcheson's work further confirms what serious students of American religious history have long known: Religion and politics do mix—usually in complex ways.

—MICHAEL T. GIROLIMON

Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology. By Daniel L. Migliore. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991, 312 pages.

Finally, an introductory textbook to theology has been written which is as manageable as it is comprehensive, as innovative as it is orthodox, and as imaginative as it is careful. Migliore's *Faith Seeking Understanding* will no doubt serve as a long-awaited tool for introducing theological students to major doctrines of the Christian faith. Those who are not beginners will appreciate this book for its fair and balanced discussion of contemporary and classical issues of theological debate.

As the title suggests, Migliore begins by establishing that the task of theology is to ask questions from the situation of faith. Theology is, in fact, "thoughtful faith" (p. 6). This question-asking posture is evident throughout the text, and is more than a pedagogically helpful technique. In his voice as author, Migliore models a deep, searching, involved struggle with the doctrines of the Christian faith. This is clearly evident in the fruitful risks he takes in the book, in the challenges he offers his readers, and in his commitment to the power of Christian hope which is infused throughout.

Migliore's risk-taking is seen in his forthright discussion of a variety of touchy theological issues, including the resistance to trinitarian formulations of God (chapter 4), the liberationist understanding of the cross as "a protest against unjust suffering" (p. 157), the use of the feminine pronoun in reference to the Holy Spirit (pp. 173–174), the potential inadequacies of infant baptism (pp. 214–220), and the relationship of hell to Christian hope (pp. 245–247). Migliore is bold enough to admit "important deficiencies of the classical Christological tradition," and to offer "proposals for its reformulation" in chapter 8 (p. 145). Particularly provocative is his work in chapter 6, "The Providence of God and the Mystery of Evil." Here, he struggles with the ramifications of the "diabolical" nature of the Holocaust, drawing upon the work of Jewish scholars such as Arthur Cohen and Elie Wiesel.

One of the most rewarding risks Migliore takes is his incorporation of theologians of many times, places, and positions. Barth, Calvin, H. Richard Niebuhr, and Tillich are indeed prominent, but the voices of Boff, Gutierrez, McFague, Russell, Ruether, Schüssler Fiorenza, and Sobrino (as well as others) are clearly not used as mere “foils” for prior conceptions of reformed orthodoxy. Diverse thinkers engage in real dialogue in *Faith Seeking Understanding*, and this makes for lively study. The underlying dialogue in Migliore’s presentation is made explicit in his three appendices, where characters such as “Karl Barth,” “Reinhold Niebuhr,” “Moltmannian,” “Liberationist,” “Pannenbergian,” and “Feminist” engage in imaginary discussions about natural theology, the resurrection, and political theology.

Migliore takes his greatest risk, perhaps, in challenging his readers. For those who prefer an introductory text to be uncomplicated and soothing in nature, Migliore’s book might prove a disappointment. At the end of his chapter 4, “The Triune God,” for example, Migliore probingly inquires if “the personal and corporate lives of Christians give evidence of commitment to the triune God” who, in Jesus Christ, “continues the work of renewal and transformation by the power of the Holy Spirit” (p. 79). In his discussion of the Holy Spirit, Migliore offers an incisive critique of the American “consumerist” society, challenging his readers to recognize that problems such as drug addiction result from human failure to find acceptance and to achieve self-justification (p. 176). Using an illustration from Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* to demonstrate the “revolutionary potency . . . of the biblical message,” Migliore implicitly summons his readers to recognize their spiritual need for justification and to realize their identities as those who are “loved by God” (p. 177).

At the heart of Migliore’s risk-taking and offering of challenges lies a sense of anticipation. *Faith Seeking Understanding* is propelled by and thoroughly infused with Christian hope. “Apart from hope, every Christian doctrine becomes distorted,” writes Migliore in his final chapter, suitably entitled “Christian Hope” (p. 231). A hope-full understanding of humanity, for example,

involves recognizing ourselves as created in the image of God and therefore “restless for God’s great conclusion of the work of creation and redemption.” This enables us to exercise “our human freedom . . . [by] using our creative imagination to envision a more just society” (p. 138, cf. chapter 7). Migliore regards the eucharistic meal as “anticipation of the joyful messianic banquet” which celebrates “our confidence in God . . . whose grace will ultimately triumph over all evil, sin, and death” (p. 182). For “The New Community” of believers (chapter 10), the activity of Christian hope is empowered by the person and work of Christ: “When the church keeps its eyes on Christ,” writes Migliore, “it is in touch with the one necessary power of continuous reform and renewal of ecclesial life” (p. 199).

Because Migliore introduces theological questions in all their complexity and represents a diversity of theological voices, his book might at times prove unsatisfactory for those who align themselves closely with a particular theological perspective. Those favoring classical theological approaches may praise Migliore’s trinitarian emphasis and his respect for conventional doctrinal formulations, but wonder why, in a work focused on hope, there is no substantial discussion of Christ’s resurrection, except in an appendix. And while those who speak from the margins of traditional theological discourse will no doubt appreciate Migliore’s sensitivity to issues of oppression and liberation, they might question whether he adequately represents the revolutionary spirit of their emancipatory enterprise. Can the “weak and powerless” really be heard as equals when speaking in the midst of traditional voices? (p. 17). The question is whether Migliore has successfully integrated the plethora of different perspectives or whether he has taken on an impossible task.

All in all, *Faith Seeking Understanding* assimilates, from a reformed perspective, insights from a diverse stream of theological voices, with Migliore unabashedly suggesting to the reader that they are, in many ways, theologically compatible. While it is, at times, impossible to pretend that these voices may appropriately be harmonized, it is often the very dissonances in Migliore’s book

which prove the most theologically stimulating. Migliore's creative risks challenge the reader to ask those questions which, if struggled with courageously, honestly, and actively, will lead us toward the actualization of the hope that is ours.

—CYNTHIA L. RIGBY

The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions. By Jürgen Moltmann. Trans. Margaret Kohl. Harper & Collins, 1990, 388 pages.

With this book Jürgen Moltmann offers another welcome and solid contribution to one of the more pertinent and exciting contemporary theological projects: the series entitled "Messianic Theology," which he began in 1980 with *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. As he has defined it, messianic theology is theology done "under the presupposition of the presence of the Messiah and the beginning of the messianic era" (*God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, p. 60). In this volume, the third in the series, Moltmann develops his Christology accordingly, extending and deepening his earlier work in *Theology of Hope* and *The Crucified God*. Here he makes "the now necessary transition . . . to a post-modern Christology, which places human history ecologically in the framework of nature" (p. xvi). The result is what readers have come to expect from Jürgen Moltmann: theology that is fascinating, provocative, boldly original, and yet also somewhat frustrating.

Moltmann begins by examining the origin and development of Jewish messianic expectation as the presupposition for faith in Jesus as the Messiah. While he continues to work at overcoming long-standing divisions between Judaism and Christianity, he eschews any easy reconciliation by way of simple concessions. Christian theology, he argues, must recognize the rightfulness of the Jewish protest that the world is not yet redeemed. Consequently, Jesus cannot yet be "the Christ of the parousia, who comes in the glory of God" (p. 32). But to the Jewish objection, "How can one 'be a Christian in this unredeemed world'?"

Moltmann asks in return, "How can one 'be a Jew in this Godless world'?" (p. 30). Judaism and Christianity are portrayed as parallel yet distinct expressions of hope for the coming reign of God.

Moltmann next discusses concerns and questions of the present, arguing that Christology must be rooted in the biblical witness and related to the conflicts and oppressions of the present in a "therapeutically" relevant way. He seeks to understand Jesus in a trinitarian framework. Jesus' person and work develop through his relationship to the Spirit and to the God whom he called "Abba." Moltmann unpacks the saving significance of Jesus' suffering and death in their "apocalyptic" dimensions. The logic of his understanding of the saving significance of these is more accessible here than before, and it is now extended to relate to all of creation.

Crucial to Moltmann's argument is his view of the resurrection as heralding the dawning of the new creation and providing a horizon of hope within which Jesus' suffering and death must be understood. He discusses the redemptive significance of Christ in relation to the broader spheres of creation and the processes of evolution. Moltmann seeks to extend his understanding of the saving significance of Jesus to the cosmic perspective and works with a holistic framework, stressing the interrelationships in the redemption of humanity and nature. In so doing he never loses sight of the conflicts and sufferings of the present (p. 63f).

Against the stream of some current theologies, Moltmann continues to insist that in the New Testament accounts, "the salient point is the event of Jesus' death on the cross, and the experience of the presence of the risen One in the Spirit" (p. 75). Jesus' suffering and death have a reconciling and redemptive significance beyond their moral influence. From this focal point flows a perspective sharply attuned to conflicts in the present, particularly between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless. This attention to the often mute sufferings of the present is carried through in discussions of Christ's saving significance for the whole of reality in a way that gives Moltmann's messianic Christology a scandalous and welcome sense of prophetic realism.

The book closes with a discussion of the expectation of the parousia of Christ.

Though at times densely written and somewhat difficult to follow, this is a book that laity, clergy, and academics alike can profitably read. Preachers will find many helpful sections, such as the expositions of Jesus' healing miracles and the Sermon on the Mount. The book is also in sustained and serious dialogue with other Christologies, both classical and contemporary. It is a piece of reforming theology in which Moltmann critically appraises the Christian tradition and takes up insights from surprising places in a way that is bound to provoke critical response. The extensions of his previous thought are fascinating. As always, he attempts to overcome dichotomies in the Christian tradition that have become entrenched into seemingly insoluble oppositions.

Moltmann is concerned to understand Jesus' person and work in interrelationship and interdependence with those who surround and follow Jesus. This results, in part, from an engagement throughout the book with the questions and concerns of feminist theology. But feminists are bound to ask why, for instance, in the section on the contemporary theology of martyrdom, no examples of women are discussed. Given the empowering influence of those remembered as martyrs and the continuing violence and oppression directed against women, this is a regrettable omission.

Like many postmodern theorists, Moltmann assesses the postmodern context as embracing human history within the ecological context. But postmodernism also presents Christianity, as well as other traditions, with a radically different challenge: How do we avoid relativizing all truth claims? To meet this challenge, Moltmann needs to relate his interpretation of the Christian tradition to outside perspectives as convincingly as he has argued for the influence of these perspectives on the biblical and theological traditions.

In one sense *The Way of Jesus Christ* is accessibly written. Moltmann's substantive positions are well-defined and clearly articulated in relation to the biblical witness, the theological tradition, and the "conflicts and contradictions of the present."

And yet it is often hard to determine how Moltmann arrives at his positions. A carefully developed methodology is undoubtedly present beneath the surface of the text (cf. p. 71), but its precise contours remain frustratingly elusive. Because the inner workings of his thought are at many points mysterious, the “logos” of Moltmann’s Christology is difficult to grasp.

North American theologies tend to be long on method and short on the sort of theological substance for which Moltmann is known. But the presence of a clearly articulated method is not to be slighted, for this is what gives a theology a public, communal dimension, enabling others to enter into it constructively. Until others can follow the inner logic of Moltmann’s thought, they may be inspired, informed, or provoked by it, but they will have difficulty in making it their own. Moltmann does plan to publish his views on theological method in his series on messianic theology, but not until the fifth volume. We can only hope that he will be better preserved for this than was Niebergall, for until he makes his methodology explicit, Moltmann’s fascinating and prophetic theology will remain somewhat inaccessible to most.

In sum, Moltmann has produced a substantial, original Christology—a timely, stimulating reflection on who Jesus Christ is for the church in middle class Europe and North America today. Despite some shortcomings, he continues to be one of the most relevant of contemporary theologians.

—DONALD SCHWEITZER

Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling. Ed. Rodney J. Hunter, H. Newton Malony, Liston O. Mills, and John Patton. Abingdon Press, 1990, 1346 pages.

I once heard a former publisher of *Scientific American* open a speech by saying that his magazine was of such breadth it had topics in which everyone could be disinterested. The *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling* is of such scope that it both meets and

transcends the interest of those concerned with this field. One can only commend the general editor, Rodney Hunter, and his associates, for producing a volume of great breadth without delving into the obscure. There is little room to question whether any of the topics are not related to the general area of pastoral care and counseling. Whether one is an academician, a local pastor, a student, or a specialist, this book will be an excellent resource and reference for years to come.

The format is that of a dictionary of topics arranged alphabetically. One of the strengths of the text is a detailed cross-referencing system that places issues in larger or related categories. The defining articles on each topic also include a bibliography useful for further study. True to the nature of the dictionary, the articles are not polemical. Rather, the articles are summaries or surveys of the main issues that define the topic at hand.

The field of pastoral care is currently re-searching its foundations and parameters. Thus the *Dictionary* is a timely contribution as it gathers into one volume elements of history and current thought, and identifies important figures in the field. The *Dictionary* includes brief biographical sketches of significant current and historic thinkers and practitioners. One can read about Anton Boisen, St. Theresa of Avila, and a host of others. Different psychological approaches and theological categories receive careful scrutiny. Various streams of psychological theory and practice are identified and related to their culture and history, to theology, and to pastoral care and counseling. Pastoral care and counseling are set in relation to such theological categories as providence, revelation, and eschatology.

I am impressed with the book's reflection of the field's developing awareness of the particularities unique to varying groups of people. This book is not a rehearsal of educated, white, American values and perspectives. The differences attendant upon gender, geography, ethnicity, and religious background are clearly presented in their general terms as well as in their relation to specific topics. For example, there are general articles on such topics as

“Latin American Pastoral Care Movement,” “Feminist Theology and Pastoral Care,” and “Black American Pastoral Care.” More specifically, such topics as “Family” and “Mental Retardation” have special discussions on Jewish concerns and “Divorce” has a special section on Orthodox concerns. Such a topic as “Mourning” gives us a cross-reference to the section on “Cultural and Ethnic Factors in Pastoral Care.” These are currently some of the “stretching points” of pastoral care.

Some more practical topics (e.g., listening, multiple staff ministries, hospital visitation, and crisis ministry) are also presented. One can even read about pastoral care of “rich persons.” These are not intended to be a summary of techniques. Rather, “they offer perspectives, insights, questions, suggestions—not pigeon-holed problems and quick-fix techniques” (p. xi). Still, the volume serves well in providing “practical information and guidance” for practitioners in specific situations. This is a gathering together of such a breadth of topics in one volume that it may well help us to gain some perspectives on the field that would not otherwise be available.

This volume has long been expected. Despite its thoroughness, one might suggest some additions or changes for revisions in future generations. I looked for listings for “codependency” and “hymnody” but did not find them. (I believe Fanny Crosby, for one, is underrated as a pastoral care figure and deserves mention.) It might also be helpful in the listing of abbreviations to remove “CPE” from the list of various biblical translations! But these are minor and should not detract from the voluminous task and major contribution of Dr. Hunter and colleagues.

The title suggests a conflict between two of the book’s purposes. The title supports a purpose Hunter articulates: “To provide focus and identity for contemporary pastoral care and counseling” (p. xii). The phrase “pastoral care and counseling” is of such common usage that its elements are mutually definitive. That is, when pastoral counseling is understood as a narrower or more particular form of pastoral care, then pastoral care comes to be

understood as the broader form of counseling. Another purpose of the volume is “to promote dialogue . . . between pastoral care and counseling and other expressions of ministry, such as preaching, teaching, worship, church leadership, and social witness” (p. xii).

If one of the interests of the volume and the field concerns a critical process of self-definition, then it might be more helpful to include the word *counseling* as one of the “expressions of ministry” and not as the dominant modifier of pastoral care. Then, perhaps, each “expression of ministry” could modify “pastoral care” with more equality, test the others, and enrich our understanding of the theory, role, and practice of pastoral care. For instance, if one considers worship as one aspect of “pastoral care *and counseling*,” then worship is seen according to the goals and dynamics of that modifier. Suppose this were reversed and pastoral counseling were to be seen as an act of care modified by the goals and dynamics of worship.

This illustration is not a new idea. But the tension between promoting “identity” and an openness to “dialogue” can affect that identity. The title implies the former and can place a limit on the field’s ability to be self-critical. I realize the title reflects where we are historically. It would be unwieldy to include a list of “expressions of ministry” in the title. But one might title this volume simply “Dictionary of Pastoral Care” and trust that God will create an identity out of chaos, or at least out of complexities beyond our simple understandings.

Dr. Hunter humbly says in his preface that he hopes the volume “makes a satisfactory start simply at *naming* important issues and *suggesting* future directions” (p. xiii). There is no doubt it will. The book has placed our past and present before us, and draws us into the future. Those responsible for the *Dictionary* deserve great thanks for doing such a mammoth task well. The volume is a firm resource for thinkers and practitioners of many kinds. Our thanks may well rest in our firm and creative use of this excellent resource.

—WAYNE F. ALBERTSON

Iron John: A Book About Men. By Robert Bly. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1990, 268 pages.

“It’s important to be able to say the word *masculine* without imagining that we are saying a sexist word . . . and not be afraid that some moral carpenter will make boxes of those words and imprison us in them” (p. 234). So says Robert Bly in his best-selling book about men.

But talking about masculinity is not as easy as it seems, as Bly points out. Modern culture offers confusing and often contradictory stereotypes of manhood. Older “macho” stereotypes produce men who in their façade of strength and control are often lonely and cruel, and lack the skills or openness needed to develop depth relationships. But newer “soft” male models also fall short. Rejecting the callous violence of the older stereotypes, the new sensitive and far less harmful male embraces his “feminine” side, encouraged by emerging strong and energetic women, but lacks vitality and is unhappy.

Bly has diagnosed a deep psychic wound in the souls of modern men. This wound is not the fault of modern strong women, whose liberation Bly celebrates, but of the Industrial Revolution, which forced fathers out of the home and robbed them of their ability to mentor their sons or initiate them into male adulthood. The result several generations later is a culture of men longing for lost fathers, and not knowing where to find them.

Male initiation is not new. Deep in the legends and myths of antiquity lie buried vital masculine archetypal images which are especially potent “because they are a tree of modern psychological prejudices, because they have endured the scrutiny of generations of women and men, and because they give both the light and dark sides of manhood, the admirable and the dangerous” (p. 25). Bly enlists a host of these legends to speak to modern men.

One such legend is the legend of Iron John, an ancient story collected and recorded by the Brothers Grimm. Bly views this as an archetypal initiation legend. He employs Iron John’s plot as his organizing principle: his chapters follow the path of a young boy

who encounters Iron John and is guided by him into manhood. Older men of our day are encouraged to learn from Iron John so they can take up the call to mentor the young men of our culture toward mature manhood.

Iron John is a wild man, living in the murky depths of a forest pond (archetypically in the swampy depths of men's souls). He must be faced with courage because he is both wild and fierce. But he is able to mentor a young boy on the way to adulthood because he is also loving. Along the way, the boy must "steal the key" from under his mother's pillow (break out of the world of his mother's power); dip his wounded finger into the pond, turning it to gold (remember and face the depths of his soul "wound"); and look deeply into his own eyes in their reflection in a pond (recognize the dark side of himself). When his hair turns to gold (he gains wisdom), he must be driven from the forest to experience ashes, descent, and grief (die to grandiosity, naivete, and self-indulgence); encounter the "king" on his throne (experience the transcendent outside himself, and the sacred within); spend time in the garden (cultivate his soul in order to love); meet the God-Woman (continue the soul work as preparation for mature love by immersing himself in the feminine, but not maternal, world); fight for the king against his enemies (bring to life the interior warriors which are able to protect the boundaries of his soul against all who would transgress it); ride the red, white, and black horses (embrace the necessary stages of emotional growth from passion, to virtue, to self-honesty, humor, and compassion); be wounded in battle (pay the price of living with compassion and of being committed to the God of grief); and finally, marry the king's daughter (live in full relational adulthood).

Like any text, the story of Iron John needs to be interpreted. In this comprehensive accounting, Bly views the text structurally through the lenses of contemporary initiation rites from various parts of the world, from dozens of ancient legends and myths, and from his own insights, making for interesting reading.

This strength of Bly's book is also its weakness. Bly the poet is a master in the turn of a phrase or of the perfect word, but the

elaboration of this poetic succinctness into a fully developed composition breaks the rules of the genre and makes for ponderous reading. His use of scores of vignettes and allusions from a legion of ancient tales is overwhelming, especially for the mythological neophyte. Despite the deserved excitement generated by the book and the current need and concern for its themes, the poetic density of the book makes it an easy book to put aside.

Beyond stylistic problems, however, *Iron John* needs to be read with a healthy suspicion of its noncritical use of the ancient texts. This is evident in two ways. First, Bly's travels through the world of mythology and ancient legends assume a structural consanguinity to his claims for Iron John. These affinities are by no means as self-evident as Bly makes them, in either literary or psychological theory. One example illustrates the problem. In describing the importance water carries for the religious life in ancient legends, Bly says, "Religion here does not mean doctrine, or piety, or purity, or "faith," or "belief," or my life given to God. It means a willingness to be a fish in the holy water, to be fished for by Dionysus or one of the other fishermen, to bow the head and take hints from one's own dreams, to live a secret life, praying in a closet, to be lowly, to eat grief as the fish gulps water and lives" (p. 38). As beautiful as Bly's poetry is, his polarity of what is and what isn't true religion (suggested by water) is filled with contradictions. For instance, "faith" is intrinsically implied in Christian baptism, but "faith" for Bly is exactly what true religion is not. Furthermore, Bly's definition of true religion is little more than an extended poetic metaphor for faith itself. He wants to employ Christian symbols, but in such a way that the unique claims of Christianity are lost.

Second, Bly isn't adequately suspicious of the ancient texts themselves. While he grants that the ancient texts "give both the light and dark side of manhood, the admirable and the dangerous" (p. 23), missing is any criteria for determining what is admirable and what is dangerous. Texts don't merely mirror the soul; they order people's realities. The ancient legends and myths often portray a world that is fatalistic and whose agents are brutal

and capricious, a world which cannot be appropriated indiscriminately. Some outside standard is needed by which a person can read texts.

These problems notwithstanding, *Iron John* is a welcome book. Bly's challenge to men to face their deepest selves, his call for a renewal of male mentoring and the provision of a guide for growth, his healthy critique of existing male images, his advocacy of manhood, and his poetic immersion into the world of fairy tales and legends make this book valuable reading for all who seek to understand how to live as men in modern society.

—WILLIAM H. JACOBSEN

Fire in the Belly: On Being a Man. By Sam Keen. Bantam Books, 1991, 272 pages.

Sam Keen, author of several popular books, including *The Passionate Life*, *Apology for Wonder*, *To a Dancing God*, and *Loving Combat*, has again produced a book with a title that suggests readability. *Fire in the Belly: On Being a Man* is intended to "fill the lack" in the literature that speaks for "the most spiritually adventurous men of our time" (p. 6).

Keen's work addresses two concerns coincidentally. The first is his perception that modern men have a hard time feeling good about themselves. "Ask a man how it feels to be a man these days and he will likely tell you that he feels blamed, demeaned, and attacked" (p. 6). The book faces both the roots and the symptoms of this experienced "brokenness" and offers a "hero's journey" for those who recognize the fire in their bellies and have the courage to forge from that a new vision of manhood.

Keen's second concern stems from his failure to find help in "books in print" for the modern male dilemma. Unless a man enjoys reading about "gay experience, . . . diatribes against men, . . . or warmed over feminism with a reverse twist, . . . [there is little] to stir the head, the heart, or the gonads" (p. 6).

Fire in the Belly is obliquely developmental. Modern men need to break away from their "unconscious bondage to women" (p. 14,

section I), so men and women can again come together to form a prophetic, questing community (section V). In between, traditional male initiation rites—the rites of war, work, and sex—are deconstructed (section II). The evolving, culturally constructed character of exemplary manhood is offered as precedent for a new “ecological” male construct (section III). An honest “pilgrimage into the self” (p. 125) serves as a map for a new constellation of desirable male virtues, such as wonder, empathy, moral outrage, husbanding, and wildness (section IV).

It would appear that Robert Bly’s book, *Iron John*, is catalytic for Keen, who clearly shares Bly’s commitment to male responsibility for the development of male selfhood. Bly has the older men take the younger men apart for the purpose of mentoring, while Keen would have us break our bondage to the world of “WOMAN” (not to be confused with individual women), a world in which we are “enmeshed, incorporated, inwombed, and defined by ‘WOMAN’” (p. 15). Men must explore the question of first importance—“What is our journey?”—before we can ask the question of second importance—“Who will go with us?”—because only then can men be comfortable in intimacy with women (p. 23).

Keen also finds kinship with Bly’s fierce “wild man.” Although Bly finds his wild man in the “swampy depths of the soul” and Keen finds his in the belly’s fire, both rebel against an overdomestication of the male psyche and of his surroundings. “When we lose the natural wildness, our need to test our wits easily gets perverted into violence against a socially designated enemy. There are still lessons best learned from meeting a bear on a trail or facing a storm in a small boat” (p. 183).

But Keen disdains the myths and legends Bly uses for his constructive proposal. “There is no how-to guide to the process of becoming a full-summed and spirited man.” This can be seen most cogently in his disparagement of the “seemingly irrational formal rites and informal customs that are designed to turn males into men” (p. 28). For instance, Bly lists traditional rites which signal the necessary breaking of the primal bond between mother

and son. For Bly, these rites signify and set boundaries on the necessarily painful movement from childhood dependence to adult male selfhood. By contrast, Keen likens them to “a page from the fantasy life of de Sade” (p. 29).

In place of Bly’s formal insights into the structure of the growing self, Keen calls for a “forward way” in which “men and women hear and respond to a common vocation to come together to create a new kind of social order that is not based upon enmity and the hope of conquest” (p. 231). This “journey,” like those of men and women during other pivotal eras in human history, is a journey into the unknown. But it is one in which we share common cause with others and one which we journey together.

Keen’s is an ambitious book with an impressive reach. It is gratifying to find an author attempting to write a constructive work on being men. Although it is likely that his broken “modern man” is more of a stereotype than a real person, I appreciate his willingness to name and discuss issues surrounding maleness which expose male stereotypes as false, thus claiming for men richer and fuller selves. He takes risks which leave him open to easy misunderstanding and criticism, but he does so in areas where growth is unlikely apart from risk-taking. His willingness to be open to and about his own shadows and doubts can be commended as grace-filled leadership, but it can also be viewed as narcissistic self-indulgence. It’s probably some of both. His challenge to men to define their *raison d’être* independent of the influence of women may be bold and thought-provoking, but lacks clarity and is more reactionary than constructive. (See, by contrast, his distinction between ideological and prophetic feminism.) Nevertheless, these risks are commendable and potentially generative.

Though the book will no doubt fulfill its goal of finding a place on the “books in print” shelf of bookstores, it has some serious problems. Particularly offensive is Keen’s ability to make profound and weighty pronouncements which are persuasive at first glance, but which cannot stand the gaze of careful scrutiny. For instance, who *are* the “most spiritually adventurous men of our time” that are being addressed? What are the criteria for “spiritual” (p. 6)?

What about the controlling metaphor, “fire in the belly”? Just what is this fire that seems to be the hope of men’s (and women’s) future? How is it experienced phenomenologically? Do women have it, or just men? And what is the value of the statement, “As far as I can tell, the new heroic man is nearly the opposite of the traditional hero” (p. 153)? If the traditional hero kept his word, as for example, Matt Dillon, in *Gunsmoke*, does that make the new hero a liar?

But these objections are less problematic than the project taken as a whole. Keen’s reach exceeds his grasp. In contrast to Bly, who makes sense out of the present with wisdom from the past, yet with a healthy criticism of both, Keen displaces the past and present with a utopian vision of self-realized ecological people committed to a common noble cause, who follow his two dictates: “remember yourselves,” and “practice compassion.” This simplistic formula for a happy future flies blindly in the face of the failure of every previous utopian dream of human self-redemption. It ignores the depths of the evil which permeates us individually and engulfs us in its systemic manifestations, and which Keen himself names.

—WILLIAM H. JACOBSEN

Acknowledgments

“Honest to God, the Real Wittgenstein: Fergus Kerr’s *Theology after Wittgenstein*”

Mark Larrimore’s article was originally written as a General Exam for the Department of Religion at Princeton University; he wishes to express his thanks to Professor Victor Preller.

—MARK LARRIMORE

“Meir Sternberg: Narrative Poetics and Biblical Ideology”

This essay first took shape as a seminar paper for Prof. Dennis T. Olson, who offered valuable criticism. An earlier form was presented in New Orleans at the Society of Biblical Literature annual meeting, Narrative Research on the Hebrew Bible Group, November 20, 1990.

—DOUGLAS B. MILLER

“Renewing the Ethic of the Eschatological Community: The Vision of Judgment in Matthew 25”

This paper originated in a seminar with Dr. Arthur Wainwright. The author wishes to express his gratitude to Dr. Wainwright for his encouragement and to Mr. Loren Johns for his substantive criticism.

—DAVID A. DE SILVA

INDEX

Koinonia Journal Volume III 1991

ARTICLES

- Billman, Kathleen D. The Paradox of Sin and the Bipolarity of Shame 73
- Bowen, Nancy R. Damage and Healing: Shame and Honor in the Old Testament 29
- Harding, Mark. Reconceiving Sin: The Irrelevance of the Bible 37
- Lane, Allan C. Sin, Pride, and Shame: A Short Historical Response to Douglas Thorpe 66
- Larrimore, Mark. Honest to God, the Real Wittgenstein: Fergus Kerr's *Theology after Wittgenstein* 103
- Love, Gregory W. Sin and the Self: The Relationship between Damage and Guilt in Christian Understandings of Redemption 56
- McNeir, D. Kevin. Searching for the Transformed Nonconformist: A Comparative Analysis of the Ethical Reflections of H. Richard Niebuhr and James M. Gustafson 131
- Megill-Cobbler, Thelma. Race, Sex, and Shame: Christological Implications 45
- Miller, Douglas B. Meir Sternberg: Narrative Poetics and Biblical Ideology 150

Silva, David A. de. <i>Renewing the Ethic of the Eschatological Community: The Vision of Judgment in Matthew 25</i>	168
Thorpe, Douglas M. <i>Brokenhearted: Sin, Shame, and the Damaged Self</i>	1

BOOK REVIEWS

Allen, Ronald J. <i>Contemporary Biblical Interpretation for Preaching.</i> Reviewed by André Resner, Jr.	83
Bly, Robert. <i>Iron John: A Book About Men.</i> Reviewed by William H. Jacobsen	212
Davidson, Robert. <i>Wisdom and Worship.</i> Reviewed by Douglas B. Miller	85
Engel, Mary Potter and Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, eds. <i>Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside.</i> Reviewed by Kimberly Parsons Chastain	89
Hengel, Martin. <i>The Johannine Question.</i> Reviewed by Loren L. Johns	91
Hunter, Rodney J., H. Newton Malony, Liston O. Mills, and John Patton, eds. <i>Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling.</i> Reviewed by Wayne F. Albertson	208
Hutcheson, Richard G., Jr. <i>God in the White House: How Religion Has Changed the Modern Presidency.</i> Reviewed by Michael T. Girolimon	198
Keen, Sam. <i>Fire in the Belly: On Being a Man.</i> Reviewed by William H. Jacobsen	215
Mandelker, Ira L. <i>Religion, Society and Utopia in Nineteenth Century America.</i> Reviewed by Craig D. Atwood	98
Migliore, Daniel L. <i>Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology.</i> Reviewed by Cynthia L. Rigby	202

- Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions.*
Reviewed by Donald Schweitzer 205
- Nelson, James B. *The Intimate Connection: Male Sexuality, Masculine Spirituality.*
Reviewed by Robert K. Martin 94
- Smith, Mark S. *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities.*
Reviewed by Kathryn L. De Witt 195

FOR USE IN LIBRARY ONLY.

Princeton Theological Seminary Libraries



1 1012 01445 5903

FOR USE IN LIBRARY ONLY.

